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What Goes Around: Swinburne's *Century of Roundels*

This essay begins, somewhat like the form of Swinburne's devising that is its subject, at the end, which is to say at the 'Envoi' concluding *A Century of Roundels* on its last and hundredth page (Swinburne 1883, 100; 1904, 5.193):

Fly, white butterflies, out to sea,
Frail pale wings for the winds to try,
Small white wings that we scarce can see
Fly.

Here and there may a chance-caught eye
Note in a score of you twain or three
Brighter or darker of tinge or dye.

Some fly light as a laugh of glee,
Some fly soft as a low long sigh:
All to the haven where each would be
Fly.

We see from this example how a roundel is wrought: in the structural terms that distinguish this formal genre, it is a double whorl displaying geometric increase.¹ A first circuit returns after three lines to the verbal point of origin – here the single word ‘Fly,’ though a phrase of two to six words is more usual in Swinburne’s *Century*; then a second circuit opens, twice as long, and runs its extended lap back to the same verbal starting line. A glance at the rhyme scheme shows, further, how within the nine long lines an elementary *aba* pattern – or, as little Hans might say, *Da-Fort-Da* (Freud 1920, 8-9) – is resumed at wider gauge by the whole poem: *aba bab aba*, run the lines, recapitulating across the ensemble of three stanzas, at a higher order of magnitude, the same *aba* structure that internally constitutes each one of them. Meanwhile, as this process takes its course, in the hemistich lines 4 and 11 the phrasal origin punctually returns to impose a full stop and clinch the *b* rhyme it quietly initiated back at the start of line 1.

If this last circumstance quickens an ear for ad-hoc internal rhyming, it should. Within the first stanza alone of roundel 100 we find, with some allowance for variation in the poetic license, ‘Fly’ and ‘butterflies,’ ‘Frail’ and ‘pale,’ ‘wings’ and ‘winds,’ and ‘white’ with itself two lines later, again in second syllabic position. This exact repetition also highlights the oddity of *rime riche* linking ‘sea’ to its homonym ‘see’ as end-rhymes for lines 1 and 3.² The mix of sameness with difference that makes a rhyme rhyme is also at play – or at least something very like it is – in the rhythm of this roundel, whose tetrameter one hesitates to specify as either iambic or anapestic because Swinburne so freely plays duple, triple and spondaic rhythms across the four-foot base. The nine scannable lines yield five distinct scansion, and yet the very diversity among these

scansions exhibits pattern at a higher level. Lines 1-3 (call them the ‘A’ stanza) share an identical prosody (spondee-trochee-iamb-iamb), which in the ‘B’ stanza lines 5-7 replace with hoppier rhythms but which then returns – just where the rhyme scheme would suggest we look for it – in line 8 as the original *aba* rhyme of the ‘A’ stanza comes back: ‘Some fly light as a laugh of glee.’ Line 9 then repeats line 8’s syntax, but not its rhythm, not quite, given the final spondee: ‘Some fly soft as a low long sigh.’ And line 10 then resumes the alternative rhythm (trochee-iamb-anapest-iamb) that had prevailed in stanza B with lines 6 and 7. This leaves us – always presuming the gentle reader’s patience in such matters of detail – one rhythmical singleton, namely line 5. Such singularity always merits a second look in things so small, to see what else there may be special about the nearly stagey pause which that spondee effects at the enjambed threshold of line 6: ‘Here and there may a chance-caught eye. . .’ What may a chance-caught eye chance to do? ‘. . . Note in a score of you twain or three,’ that’s what: what the chance-caught eye may catch is, in other words, lepidopteral microvariations of the kind that by now it may be conceded are, *mutatis mutandis*, the very life of a roundel well wrought. After all, eyes ‘note,’ but so do ears, especially when nudged as here to do their noting ‘in a score,’ which is to say, by a surely licit Swinburnean pun, in a text marked for acoustic performance.

The reader’s indulgence of just a few more closely analytic matters should make the more general reflections shortly to follow feel by contrast like large-motor activity, and should make Swinburne’s *Century of Roundels* taken as a whole seem, as with acquaintance they do become, positively roomy. One matter has to do with our seed term or *logos spermatikos*, the upper-cased monosyllable ‘Fly.’ Each of its three occurrences

is a verb: enlisting it as a noun would, I suspect, have struck Swinburne as too cheap a way to purchase the variety he preferred achieving by other means; for at each occurrence the verb 'Fly' appears in a different mood, or mode. Line 1 issues the imperative, as in a conventional envoi it should: 'Go, litel bok,' 'Go, dumb-born book,' and so forth.³ 'Fly' in line 4 is a fancier thing, a doubly subordinated infinitive that hangs from the main infinitive 'see' that hangs in turn from the main verb 'can.' Thus the flight of the butterfly flutters at a double remove from power: it's a verb, all right, but one that, as the line above it points out, we scarce can see as such.⁴ At last, in line 11, our refrain verb comes back for its curtain call in a role that lines 9 and 10 have rehearsed in lower-case cameo: all Swinburne's footwork comes down to the blunt aplomb of a main verb and the simplicity of the declarative mood. The flashy exhortation of apostrophic command (line 1) and the intricacies of *trompe-l'oeil* perceptual relativity (line 5) give final word to what was always this poet's place of greatest strength: the statement of the case, the unconstrained concession that things are the way they are and not otherwise.

Like so many figures in Swinburne's poetry, the butterflies are questers, souls at risk but not at a loss. Traditional emblems in art and literature for the metamorphic psyche at the threshold of life and death, all are animated by a motive desire, all bound by a destiny to seek 'the haven where each would be.' Where that haven may lie the roundel never gets around to saying. It prefers leaving us to frame some answer – an answer that homes in, I suspect, on a point where birth intersects mortality.⁵ For what the roundel doesn't say, *A Century of Roundels* does; the concluding image of flight to a 'haven' is an end that recapitulates a distant textual beginning, sending us back to the roundel entitled 'In Harbour' that appears on page 1. Call that page square 1 and the printed work as such

becomes freshly prominent, its gatherings and openings bibliographical figures for the overdetermined hazards of the venture to which a poet commits wingèd words on frail paper for the winds to try. Go, litel bok; fly, white butterflies; scatter, ye leaves, my words among mankind; and take, in the world, the chances your rhyme and rhythm have been in faithful training for.

One thing to love about Swinburne's little book is the modest thrift whereby it contrives to make page numbers do double duty as poem numbers, without incurring the Roman-numerical pretension of *In Memoriam* or *Sonnets from the Portuguese* or forfeiting the pleasure that a collector might take in grouping roundel sequences into suites like 'A Baby's Death' (36-42) 'In Guernsey' (92-99), or – my favorite – 'Recollections' (5-7; re-collection being just what the circuitous form of the roundel, and *a fortiori* an anthology of roundels, does). In another of these suites, a trio entitled 'A Ninth Birthday' (56-58) sprout from the same three-word seed-phrase, 'Three times thrice,' which phrase of course turns up – as the formal arithmetic dictates – nine times, or three times thrice.⁶ Not exactly a roundel of roundels; but the ghost of a fractal analogy is there to tickle the mind. Or consider, again, how the whole sequence falls macrostructurally into a threefold roundel ratio when pages 34 and 67 – at four and eight o'clock, as it were, trisecting the book's modular dial – each display a miniature *ars poetica*.

PLUS INTRA

Soul within sense, immeasurable, obscure,

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

From depth and height by measurers left immense,
Through sound and shape and colour, comes the unsure
Vague utterance, fitful with supreme suspense.

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

(Swinburne 1904, 5.140)

A SINGING LESSON

Far-fetched and dear-bought, as the proverb rehearses,
Is good, or was held so, for ladies: but nought
In a song can be good if the turn of the verse is
Far-fetched and dear-bought.

As the turn of a wave should it sound, and the thought
Ring smooth, and as light as the spray that disperses

Be the gleam of the words for the garb thereof wrought.

Let the soul in it shine through the sound as it pierces

Men's hearts with possession of music unsought;

For the bounties of song are no jealous god's mercies,

Far-fetched and dear-bought.

(Swinburne 1904, 5.165)

'Plus Intra' and 'A Singing Lesson' alike celebrate the outstripping of mere meaning by music, alias prosody, alias numbers. 'Art wakes with music's lure / Soul within sense,' and verse turns on 'sound as it pierces / Men's hearts with possession of music unsought.' The 'soul' that is in poetry must 'shine through the sound,' and 'the thought / Ring smooth,' where the primarily auditory image of ringing sound shapes up spatially in the bullseye pattern of concentered, sequentially iterative form that Swinburne's coinage the roundel epitomises. A centripetal involute, the form curls into itself, by an ever-inward (*plus intra*) economy that peculiarly justifies roundel 34's sublime rhetoric of the 'immeasurable' character of what abides 'within.'⁷ Hence the paradoxical attribution of dimensions 'by measurers left immense.' Immensity as such is an effect of the balked endeavor to measure it; the exquisite (like its better known counterpart the enormous) may compass sublimity only when mensuration has lost its way in the infinitesimal (as in its counterpart the infinite).⁸ And it is likewise the presence of metrics that makes the arresting central stanza of roundel 67 count: at the head of line 6 the poem's first clear

spondee, and at the head of line 7 its first elided iamb, let the turns of anapestic verse ring changes well worthy ‘the turn of a wave.’

‘In my beginning is my end’; ‘In my end is my beginning’; ‘And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time.’⁹ Thus *Four Quartets*: a title deriving in form, perhaps, from *A Century of Roundels*? That the Modernist poet who wrote the lines just quoted from ‘East Coker’ and ‘Little Gidding’ did so only after he had first said a lot of unhandsome things about Swinburne is no surprise.¹⁰ Nor is it surprising that Swinburne held in supreme regard the poetry of the Romantic who had written that ‘the common end of all *narrative*, nay, of *all*, Poems is to convert a *series* into a *Whole*: to make those events, which in real or imagined History move on in a *strait* Line, assume to our Understandings a *circular* motion – the snake with it’s Tail in it’s Mouth’ (Coleridge 1959, 545). Three major poet-critics – Coleridge, Swinburne, Eliot – all apprehended the workings of imaginative form as metamorphoses of the circle.¹¹ Bent on curbing the tangent and centrifugal linearity of meaning to the bit of form, they all wreathed iron pokers into true-love knots, and not for the form’s sake alone but for the sake of the inwards, *plus-intra* meaning that a rounded form bore about the recurrences of life, the recursiveness of mental grasp, matter’s vast and intimate recycling, the renewal of the spirit.

To this commodious vicus of recirculation none of the three poets ministered as assiduously as Swinburne, and he never with less collaterally distracting razzle-dazzle than in *A Century of Roundels*. Here for once the whole algebra of Swinburne’s vision is patently formulated: straight, no chaser, by which of course I mean roundly delivered as the story its form tells. That story plays out the dialectic of sameness with difference

whose pet name during the nineteenth century was *change*. For the poetic imagination, the function of this dialectic is to surprise the mind into fresh apprehension of what was thought known already, its ambition less novelty than renewal of acquaintance, its goal a reconnoitering of its origin. ‘Though sight be changed for memory,’ as roundel 92 puts it, such are the returns of Romanticism that memory is ‘changed by love to sight’ again (Swinburne 1904, 5.188). Such has been modern poetry’s program for over two centuries now, differently canted and stressed by political, psychological, socio-economic and other designs: a restorative program for which the roundel’s mandate of formal return virtually spells out the code of the operating system. All poems open, run, and close; begin, develop, and conclude; and it is probably fair to say that within the Romantic tradition the default pattern contrives that the third movement shall bend or nod back towards the first. Swinburne’s roundel is so short – shorter by half than ‘the Italian type of sonnet’ to which he compared it, shorter by one-fourth even than the rondeau he stripped it down from – that merely to execute this pattern seems all that can be fairly expected of it (Swinburne 1962, 5.27). Where that is all you expect, that may be all you get: witness the late Thomas Disch’s unhappy judgment that, where Swinburne applies the form ‘across the entire discursive spectrum of the lyric. . . in the echo chamber of his roundels he manages to say virtually nothing at all’ (Disch 2002, 281). Swinburne’s rangier verses have been so routinely assailed on this score, and for so long, that it may be worth pausing over the indictment when it is pronounced, as here, on the least of his forms. Like others in the chorus of detractors, Disch went looking for Swinburne’s soul of sense in all the wrong places. Because he wanted meanings that were ingredient in the poet’s themes, all he got out of *A Century of Roundels* was forms.

Egregious formal flagrancy, which is notoriously the dragon in the gate of Swinburne's oeuvre, draws into ardent focus what more generally seems *the* problem stymieing modern readers who just can't get into poetry – any poetry, though admittedly Swinburne's sets the bar higher than most – no matter how hard they try. More often than not, in my teaching experience at least, the problem is that they are trying too hard, jiggering away at the lock of conceptual meaning while, just a shift of perspective away, the doors of perception stand open wide. The annoyance poetry causes such minds may be epitomised in the pointless loop of the roundel form, which, going nowhere by design, manages to say, even to Disch (a poet himself, who therefore should have known better), 'virtually nothing at all.' If we can refocus expectation so as to read our way not *past* form but *through* it, to grasp meaning as ingredient in verse structure rather than in spite or in lieu of it, we may attune reading more faithfully to the principled mannerism that at once declares and performs itself in phrasal refrains like 'The wind's way' in roundel 3, 'A little way' in roundel 55 or, with minimalist aplomb, 'How' in roundel 19 (Swinburne 1904, 5.117, 155, 128). In poetry *the way* is the truth and the life. *How* is indeed the question – to which right answers entail an embarrassment of thematic riches, all we know on earth and all we need to know. Working out answers to the riddle of a roundel's form lets us, moreover, renew acquaintance with modalities of literary experience that lie hidden in plain sight within some of the oldest writing we know. Witness the bravura explications offered in Mary Douglas' recent book, *Thinking in Circles*, of the ring composition that alike structures Genesis and Numbers, the *Iliad* and *Tristram Shandy*, and that, we might here add, emerged with some frequency in the nineteenth century as a sort of formally commemorative conscience or book-balancing flywheel within the era's

headlong linear- and serial-mindedness.¹² The ‘ internal organisation of parallel rungs, preferably alternating in character, the two series organised inversely,’ for which the anthropologist Douglas gives us new literary eyes, is also a pattern for which the roundel provides a template in miniature.¹³

What Disch received within the roundel’s delicate quintessence of ‘internal organisation’ as ‘echoes’ – passive, mindless or mechanical mirrors of resonance – I propose we listen for instead as *reverberations*, a word whose cognates show up in roundels 7 and 20 (Swinburne 1904, 5.120 and 129), or in other words as performed rediscoveries of the unexpected, harbored within the insistence of the same. That is what *change* means in Swinburne’s book, as we may see from the roundel he titled ‘Change’ and numbered 35:

But now life’s face beholden
Seemed bright as heaven’s bare brow
With hope of gifts withholden
But now.

From time’s full-flowering bough
Each bud spake bloom to embolden
Love’s heart, and seal his vow.

Joy’s eyes grew deep with olden
Dreams, born he wist not how;

Thought's meanest garb was golden;

But now!

(Swinburne 1904, 5.141)

Consider here the sequence of changes wrung on the seminal phrase. Like the verb 'Fly' in Swinburne's 'Envoi,' 'But now' comes back with a difference at each entrance. First it means 'Just a minute ago,' and then in line 4 'Just for the time being' (the hoped-for gifts are withheld only for now, and not for long). The difference in idiom registers a subtle advance in time from recent memory to expectant presence; this forward momentum then, with the final occurrence of the phrase, overflows into future shock: 'But now!' has at last the force of 'Now what?' There is no knowing whether what has transpired during this phrasally calibrated time lapse is a disappointment or the transmutation of once golden hope into absolutely platinum bliss. In either case an unanticipated change has taken place, one that, against the pastel and umber palette that prevails across Swinburne's 1883 book, leaps into stark relief. Yet the semantic shift within 'But now' that has recorded this bit of lyrical melodrama says something else too that matters. It says the sudden change was to have been expected, its anticipation having been ingredient from the verbal outset, hidden all along in plain sight – a sight made plain by the degrees of poetic discourse, foresight becoming hindsight for those with eyes to read, which are eyes that habituation to form tends to plant in the back of the head.

That is what I mean by these poems' *reverberation*: a harbored difference maturing within the iteration of the same. To what the autopoetic roundel 63 entitled 'The Roundel' hauntingly calls 'the ear of thought' a trebled phrase resounds, re-sounds,

or, to quote an uncannily telephonic phrase from roundel 27, ‘rings back, sonorous with regret’ (Swinburne 1904, 5.161, 134). *Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*; and *vice versa* too, it seems: the more a phrase is dwelt on in Swinburne’s murmurous rounding runes, the more it changes into a fuller version of itself. Which is why the punster’s clever paltering in a double sense – although confessedly it draws my kind as a flame does moths – in fact plays a comparatively small role in *A Century of Roundels*. In Swinburne’s hands the roundel is not just another type of ambiguity. It doesn’t wobble both or several ways; it dithers not, neither does it flinch. Instead, it unrolls its curriculum between a beginning and an end that coincide but are not therefore identical. Early and late instances of the seed phrase are not equivalent options: the latter’s value-added is, precisely, the seasoning which the rest of the poem has effected. As the poem runs its course, the phrase-reproducing fruit that it bears ripens away from witticism and towards wisdom. What the phrase names turns in the mind, with increase, more and more into what it always was to begin with.

This is why, for all its topical variegation, Swinburne’s book tends to zero in on lyric themes emphasising recognition, realisation, second guesses and second sight. Epitaphically terse elegies for dead friends, artists, and (rather too dotingly) babies fix each in memory through the form’s inherently ritual powers of recall (Swinburne 1904, 5.126-9, 132-4; 5.135-6, 185; 5.142-5, 150). Sequences on recollected moods and revisited landscapes, the two often figuring one another, practice elegy in another key, usually drawing on a dialectic of constancy and change to which we have already sampled the form’s hospitality. Anniversary poems, poems about those kissing cousins translation and ekphrasis, and one especially apt sequence involving the déjà-vu uncanny

likewise thematise the roundel movement of return (Swinburne 1904, 5.156-7, 174-8, 168-9). It's not so clear to me as it was to Harold Nicolson once upon a time that 'the mood of gentle remorse' uniquely awakens the only 'real interest' attaching to a volume that is otherwise 'merely of prosodic interest' (Nicolson 1926, 171 and 19). Talking about *merely prosodic* interest, where Swinburne is concerned, is like talking about *merely dramatic* interest in Shakespeare; but let that pass. Better turn Nicolson's order of explanation around and let form be the magnet to content. Surely the affective structure of remorse may especially be evoked by a prosodic structure that is so bent on revisiting the scene of its verbal first act. Furthermore, such a structure virtually prompts the redoubling of emotional honesty, the ethical deepening of candor at a point where illusions are all one has left to lose, and Had-I-but-known ('Had I wist,' roundel 4) yields place to And-I-did-know.

Witness this slow conversion of pathos to ethos within roundel 32, identified by its title as a prelude to Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, in a generous tribute that falls within a year of Swinburne's own magnum opus on the same material:

Fate, out of the deep sea's gloom,
When a man's heart's pride grows great,
And nought seems now to foredoom
Fate,

Fate, laden with fears in wait,
Draws close through the clouds that loom,

Till the soul see, all too late,

More dark than a dead world's tomb,

More high than the sheer dawn's gate,

More deep than the wide sea's womb,

Fate.

(Swinburne 1904, 5.137-8)

Not much wiggle room for equivocation there. Eat your heart out, disambiguators in the line of Empson. Between the fathomless depths of 'the deep sea's gloom' in line 1 and of 'the wide sea's womb' in line 10, what space for the swift mind dividing this way and that in thought? So little does Fate swerve that the poetic problem may be – as if to anticipate Disch and Nicolson – finding anything to say about it at all. Still, here as in his own *Tristram* and indeed across his oeuvre, Swinburne mobilises fate imaginatively by rehearsing the changes that its very immensity prompts within the human endeavor to come to terms with it. 'Fate' in roundel 32 is notional at first, an idea entertained by the mind when young but in truth inaccessible to authentic existential foresight. A name rumored by others, an abstraction received on authority that in juvenile experience 'nought seems' to verify, 'Fate' to the proud early mind is just, as we say, a word. Thus the poem's first, lesser circuit between one 'Fate' in line 1 and another in line 4. The second, major circuit then makes good on the word through a steady aggravation of syntax, whereby 'Fate' is felt as not an idea but an eventual accumulating force, legible only in hindsight, 'too late' and, I should judge from the last three images, too

overwhelming for the soul even to ‘see’ at all. What the soul can finally know, if only once the last line clinches the syntax the first has opened, is that ‘Fate’ is both subject and object of its one inexorable sentence of doom, within which the epiphenomena of human consciousness occupy merely subordinate clauses.

This roundel’s one real anomaly is the formally non-mandatory reiteration of ‘Fate’ at the start of line 5, a line that reverberates, into the bargain, the word’s every phoneme a second time: ‘Fate, laden with fears in wait.’ This fourth, gratuitous sowing of the seed word feels almost like cheating. Perhaps the poet doth insist too much? Perhaps he doth, compassionately solicitous to tip his hand and mitigate with an extra hint the catastrophe his syntax holds in store. The anomaly can at least underscore for us here one peculiar side-effect of the roundel’s verbal repetition: the atrophy, across much of the book, of pronouns. In ordinary prose usage at least one of the instances of ‘Fate’ in this poem surely would have been an ‘it’ – an observation also applicable to several other roundels that use a noun or noun phrase as the repetend. The rules of Swinburne’s invented form of course forbid such pronominal substitution; but the question then becomes why the invention of a form enforcing that prohibition should have appealed to him. The answer probably involves his skepticism about substitution as such, along with its civilised cousins the delegation of political power, the outsourcing of imagination to religious fetishism, and the sublimation of erotic desire.¹⁴ In this as in many other habits of his writing, Swinburne was uncommonly reluctant to take for granted the premise that our usage of pronouns has to take for granted, which is a received consensus about what words name. This poet wanted words to earn their meanings on the job, within the force field of quickening suggestion and due constraint set up by the verbal vicinity they

worked in; and the slightly compulsive machinery of the roundel had them do so in an unusually controlled environment, along the learning curve of defamiliarisation and reacquaintance that a well wrought loop of eleven lines might execute.

1 Rooksby 1985 aptly likens the form to a seashell, both for its circular enlargement and for certain corollary 'effects of emptiness' (p. 256).

2 The same trick reappears in roundel 11. *Rime riche* becomes a device for subtle punning in roundel 3, where the noun 'swallow' rhymes with itself as a verb; likewise in roundel 7 the verb 'passes' comes back in rhyming place as a plural noun; 'still' the adverb rhymes with 'still' the adjective in roundel 61. And in roundel 73 the verb/noun rhyme of 'rose' not only rhymes with the seed word 'Eros' but is also its anagram.

3 These are the envois, respectively, from Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and from Pound's 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley.'

4 Disclosure: I have suppressed (unless under the roundel's aegis endnotes enjoy more cachet than elsewhere) the admittedly valid reading that would construe 'Fly' in line 4 as a main verb predicating that the 'Small white wings' of line 3, nearly invisible though they be, do indeed fly. This possibility strikes me as less interesting, less intuitive, and less euphonious when pronounced than the double-jointed infinitive. Still, a reader who perceives both options may be pleased to interpret the syntactic ambiguity as germane flutter at a different level.

5 Without doubt such a biographical threshold is where Swinburne's roundel originated. As he explained in a letter of 22 June 1883 to A. H. Japp, 'Having begun by writing on the spur of a moment those roundels on the death of a friend's infant child I took a fancy to the form and went on scribbling in it till in two months' time I had a hundred' (Swinburne 1962, 5.27). By editor Cecil Lang's count a full dozen of the *Century* concern the death of one of two infant twins (Swinburne 1962, 5.86).

6 These groupings are emphasized typographically, at the sacrifice of the elegance of pagination that graces the 1883 book, in volume 5 of the 1904 *Collected Poems*, where the groups I have singled out occur respectively on pp. 142-5, 188-92, 119-20, 156-7.

7 Susan Stewart's meditations on miniaturisation effects are also pertinent here: 'The more complicated the object, the more intricate, and the more these complications and intricacies are attended to, the "larger" the object is in significance' (Stewart 1984, 89).

8 This parallel or tangency of inner with outer, micro with macro immensities is manifest in the linkage of 'Plus Intra' (roundel 34) with 'Plus Ultra' (roundel 13), where the refrain 'Far beyond' migrates from a preposition – its object, 'the sunrise and the sunset,' vast but still declared – to a free-floating modifier, neither adjective quite nor adverb, a verbal principle of sheer excess. The inside/outside topology of

the roundel's ring or torus form is treated, with a twist, in an unpublished paper delivered by Joanna Swafford at the 2010 conference of the Victorians Institute, 'Swinburne and the Möbius Strip: Circumvented Circularity in *A Century of Roundels*' (University of Virginia, 1 October 2010).

9 'East Coker,' lines 1, 14, 50, 209; and 'Little Gidding,' lines 240-2, in Eliot 1943.

10 I have in mind 'Swinburne as Poet' (in Eliot 1920), an essay that did not inaugurate, but did firmly install into the judgment of two critical generations, the conviction that Swinburne was linguistically sonorous but referentially impaired. In fact Eliot's essay is more analytically appreciative than one can readily tell from the effect it had on later readers.

11 This last phrase belongs to Poulet, 1961: see pp. 185ff. on Coleridge as the great circle-obsessed English Romantic. Poulet's discussion of Baudelaire is filled with suggestions that should prove useful to the student of Swinburne: e. g., how sundered subjective and objective worlds may be re-conjugated in the shuddering ('frisson') or vibration of verse (Poulet 1961, 409-10). The French connection in which Swinburne's formal adaptation of roundel from rondeau originated persists into Mallarmé's proposing 'a similarity between the circle perpetually opened and closed by rhyme and the circles, in the grass, of the fairy or magician' (quoted in Landy 2009, 112).

12 The Brownings, to instance just two Victorian poets important to Swinburne, made conspicuous use of circular form. On Barrett Browning's adaptation of Homeric ring structure see Tucker 1993, 63-5. Browning's structural plan for *The Ring and the Book* is bespoken in its title, while the practice is inventoried across his lyric output with impressive comprehensiveness by Bright 1996.

13 My quotation from Douglas 2007, 74, omits her criterion of a 'strongly marked central place' because this criterion evidently interested Swinburne only intermittently. What Douglas calls 'central loading' (p. 37) does appear, e. g., in the metapoetic roundel 63 ('The Roundel'), where the medial sixth line – 'Love, laughter, or mourning – remembrance of rapture or fear' – uniquely articulates a burden of content charging the form to which the five symmetrically paralleled lines on either side are devoted instead. Parallels of sound and image are also prominent in the corresponding rungs of roundel 32 ('Tristan und Isolde'), quoted and discussed below. But ordinarily Swinburne obviates emphasis on the poetic center, probably because in so condensed a form the structural balance is immediately perspicuous.

14 Of these perennial topics, *A Century of Roundels* directly addresses only the last, but that one arises often. 'Eros' appears three-times-thrice as the seed term for roundels 73-75, and 'Aperotos Eros' (roundel 88) drives the genre into a classic severity reminiscent of *Atalanta in Calydon* at its starkest. Even 'Love Lies Bleeding' and 'Love in a Mist,' paired 'flower-pieces' (roundels 68-9) of an apparent slightness,

acknowledge erotic asperities continuous with the puzzling 'Wasted Love' (65) and the ponderous 'Dead Love' (84).

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