Ekphrases, autopsies, diffusions

Detail in A.C. Swinburne's poetry

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The fate of Swinburne's posterity in the first half of the twentieth century is regarded to have been sealed by one specific critique written by T.S. Eliot in 1921:

> The words of condemnation are words which express his qualities. You may say "diffuse." But the diffuseness is essential; had Swinburne practised greater concentration his verse would be, not better in the same kind, but a different thing. His diffuseness is one of his glories. (Eliot 1)

As Rikky Rooksby notes in 1993, Eliot's comments contributed to relegating Swinburne to the periphery of Victorian canon in 20th-century criticism: "Eliot marginalized Swinburne by damning with faint praise" (Rooksby 4). Catherine Maxwell fully agrees with this, assessing that many later critics stood by Eliot's critique without questioning it, seeing "the modernist poet's view as the critical last word" (Maxwell, 214).

In his iconically backhanded compliment (or overtly hostile comment), Eliot points out Swinburne's tendency to create "diffuse" verse, in which poetic narration is dilated, diluted into moments of apparent suspension. The reading progression is halted by poetic stations, moments of suspension in which the poetic narration seems to whirr to a halt. Aesthetic and prosodic details, in their apparent superfluous nature, inform us about Swinburne's underlying poetics.

This paper will examine how details act as an element of decomposition of the real (in a Lacanian sense), which enables the reader to understand the poet's microscopic approach of the mechanisms of matter. We will try to understand in what way Swinburne's poetic phenomenology is a phenomenology of detail. As we will demonstrate, the poet often articulates a detailed textual de-composition to a physical decomposition. In that sense, Swinburne's phenomenology of detail provides us with a sort of poetic autopsy that pervades his art, and exposes underlying dynamics within fin-de-siècle *décadence.*

In 2020, a decade after the centenary of Swinburne's death, and four years after the hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the publication of the first edition of the *Poems and Ballads*, the state of research in Swinburnean studies is in good shape. Those two landmark anniversaries have engendered several collective books and conferences that have helped re-shape and renew Swinburnean studies. Celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the poet's death, the brilliant *A. C. Swinburne and the Singing Word: New Perspectives on the Mature Work*, edited by Yisrael Levin, opened the way into a better knowledge of the poet's mature poems, that were previously mostly disregarded by Victorianists. The collective book has started a revolution among Swinburne specialists, as it has incentivised scholars to look beyond the cliché of a verbose, unstructured Swinburne described in Eliot's 1921 essay.

In 2013, Catherine Maxwell and Stefano Evangelista published *Algernon Charles Swinburne: Unofficial Laureate*, another seminal collective book, in the wake of Levin's 2005 effort. Maxwell and Evangelista's work helped re-position Swinburne within the Victorian canon, in order to look past the scandalous reputation that still tarnished his posterity within Victorian studies. Today, Swinburne is gradually regaining a more central position in Victorian studies, and the long-lasting effect of negative criticism from the Modernists and New Criticism authors has been overturned.

The anniversary conference for the 150th anniversary of the first edition of the *Poems and Ballads* was held at St John's College, Cambridge in the summer of 2016. In a continuation of the collective effort of Levin, Maxwell and Evangelista, who focused on the exploration of previously-overlooked work, the conference extended the movement by opening a new perspective on Swinburne's most-studied collection.

One of the main lines of the conference was to position Swinburne in a broader cultural context, within European literature and interdisciplinary studies.

In France, Swinburnean studies have experienced a renewed interest after the publication of *Swinburne and France*, edited by Denis Bonnecase and Sébastien Scarpa in 2012. The project of the book was to re-establish the strong link between the poet, an avid Francophile, and French literature. Gradually, Swinburne's place in English Literature studies in France is gaining more and more visibility.

Detail as diffusion and digression

But let's first go back to Eliot's 1921 essay to try and understand how attention to detail can be perceived as a textual weakness. A possible explanation for Eliot's point can be found in Swinburne's tendency to articulate two apparently diametrically opposed dimensions—the infinitesimally small and the infinitely large—in the body of the text. The result is a poetic text that resides in a grey area, an interstice between those two ends of the spectrum of human understanding. Swinburne's fascination with detail can only be understood if introduced by his equal fascination for limitless spaces, and in order to understand Swinburne's phenomenology of detail, we need to understand his fascination with the sea, with its blurring of every notion of scale and dimension. As Jerome McGann phrases it:

> [Swinburne's] love of [...] "the unplumbed, salt estranging sea" was boundless and it supplied him with a type of phenomenal awareness that is perhaps unique in English literature. Only Ovid and Lucretius have left us equivalent literary records of the infinite, majestic universe that quantum mechanics would shortly begin to explore in functional terms. (McGann 208)

Swinburne's poetics enthrone him as the artisan of textual infinity, the craftsman of a poetic system that builds itself on micro-mechanisms. The idea that the microscopic becomes the tool that enables the poem to explore infinity is central in Swinburne's work. The poet's domain of predilection, in order to explore and manipulate such dimensions, revolves around the concept of death, in its biological, aesthetic and thematic sense. Mortified, decaying corporeality becomes one of the focal points into Swinburne's art that shows best this tension between surface details and underlying dynamics. Post-mortem connotations abound in Swinburne's work, and details act as textual symptoms of a larger manifestation that would be unfathomable if not *detailed down*.

Under the microscope of biology, death corresponds to the moment when the body stops containing itself and starts de-composing. Decomposition is a concept that helps us understand Swinburne's use of death as an active principle to *de-compose* reality, to break it down into minute details translated into poetry. In a contradictory double movement, death becomes in Swinburne a moment of *re-*connection with the world, made possible through the process of decomposition. Feeding into the same dynamic, Swinburne de-composes all the details of a scene to the point of abstraction, which prefigures the eventual disappearance of the de-composed subject. Swinburne's attention to detail enables him to reenact poetically the process of physical decomposition into the matter of the poetic text.

Swinburne's treatment of death is therefore composed of two successive moments. To put it in the terms of Georges Didi-Huberman (Didi-Huberman 11), decomposition is the theatre of a first moment of *étoilement* (a term that could be rendered in English as "*star-shaped explosion*"), before a final *étiolement* ("disappearance, withering") The multiplication of descriptive details is the poetic device that articulates the two movements, as it makes the reader go into two different directions at the same time: deeper into the fabric of reality, and further from figuration. Similar to the loss of dimension created by the maritime element, death offers the possibility to start deconstructing figuration. The idea of loss of scale made possible by the variation in degree of detail is one of the keys into Swinburne's poetics, as exemplified in the final stanza of "A Forsaken Garden":

> Till the slow sea rise and the sheer cliff crumble,
> Till terrace and meadow the deep gulfs drink,
> Till the strength of the waves of the high tides humble
> The fields that lessen, the rocks that shrink,
> Here now in his triumph where all things falter,
> Stretched out on the spoils that his own hand spread,
> As a god self-slain on his own strange altar,
> Death lies dead.

Let us delve into the series of verbs that structure this stanza: "crumble," "drink," "lessen," "shrink," "falter," and the final culmination with "lies dead." After this accumulation of terms first evoking the lexical field of disintegration, an irremediable end comes to complete the poetic movement towards complete decomposition. The final line, "Death lies dead," offers a conclusion to the poem and illustrates within itself a chorus-like return to cyclicality. It is visually shorter than the others, which

signposts the impossibility to delve deeper into details. It is all the more powerful as it stands in immediate contrast with the previous enumeration of verbs, and their account on the detailed process of decomposition undergone by the space described in the tableau. Interestingly, the final *étiolement* of the poem is highlighted by the *étoilement* that leads up to it. As the reader witnesses the gradual, methodical extinction of the various elements of the poetic description, death annihilates itself in a final movement of involution. For Swinburne, the only way to end the poem is to make any further description impossible. Detailed description was the device that enabled the poet to enact rhythmically the effects of death, the textual symptoms of it; decomposition allows matter to ferment and overbrim uncontrollably in the body of the text, creating that diffuse aspect underlined by Eliot.

Details: fuel of the poetic machine, or poetic stasis?

Is it thus fair to say that detail is the fuel that keeps Swinburne's poetic machine going? In order to understand the importance of detail and decomposition in Swinburne, it is worth considering the intricate relation between detail and poetic stasis.

In his review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story entitled *Rappacini's Daughter* (1854), Théophile Gautier defines an aesthetic of death and decay that is reminiscent of Swinburne's poetics:

> Je parle de ces nuances morbidement riches de la pourriture plus ou moins avancée, ces tons de nacre et de burgau qui glacent les eaux stagnantes, ces roses de phtisie, ces blancs de chlorose, ces jaunes fielleux de bile extravasée, ces gris plombés de brouillard pestilentiel, ces vents empoisonnés et métalliques puant l'arséniate de cuivre, ces noirs de fumée délayés par la pluie le long des murs plâtreux... toute cette gamme de couleurs exaspérées aux degrés les plus intenses, qui correspondent à l'automne, au coucher du soleil, à la maturité extrême des fruits, à la dernière heure des civilisations. (Gautier 29)

The idea that decay is an entity that engenders artistic creation and aesthetic harmony is central in Swinburne's art. For him, the more the end is delayed in details and description, the more powerful the final disintegration becomes. Decay, with its *a priori* negative connotations becomes a force of creation. The accumulation of details becomes a creative force. Physical decomposition, like decomposition into details, becomes the ferment of poetry. The crepuscular moment described by Gautier, that moment of colourful chaos before nightfall, is also at the centre of Swinburne's poetics where multiplication seems to be the harbinger of further disappearance.

However, we need to refine our understanding of the concept of a "poetic twilight" in the context of Swinburne. If the trope of the twilight is usually used to symbolise a fleeting, elusive moment, in Swinburne's art it also corresponds to a halt of the poetic machine. The twilight becomes stasis. Details pullulate and multiply, double movements of opening and closing overlap and intertwine, so much so that the temporality of the poem stretches to the point of almost disappearing, which gives the reader an impression of an almost total slowdown. In this way, one of the characteristics of Swinburne's poetic machine is that it systematically deconstructs, decomposes the physical elements of the poems (whether they be objects, plants, or body parts) with extreme meticulousness.

This poetic *modus operandi* is particularly visible in "The Garden of Cymodoce", in which each sea anemone that covers the seabed is described as:

> One infinite blossom of blossoms innumerable aflush through the gloom.
> All under the deeps of the darkness are glimmering; all over impends
> An immeasurable infinite flower of the dark that dilates and descends.
> (l. 288-290)

The smallest, most negligible object seems to offer the possibility of an endless description, which can dilate and distend *ad infinitum*. Swinburne sets up a microscopic vision of botanical and anatomical objects, which is capable of encompassing both the infinitesimally small as well as the infinitely large.

If one looks closely at the three lines quoted above, one notices that the word "infinite" is repeated at the beginning and at the end of the process of the description of the floral detail—the flower, in its symbolic finitude becomes infinite, and is enabled to stretch out and dilate unstoppably. Gradually, as the sensory frame of the poem gets lost in between those two "infinite" milestones, the reader loses the notion of space and proportion: beautiful becomes monstrous, monstrous becomes beautiful.

The idea of dissolution of poetic narration *into* form becomes visible as one of the main aesthetic principles of Swinburne's art. If meaning seems to become weaker, what floats up is a form of poetic abstraction that presents the poetic object in a radically new fashion. The object is not recognizable as such, but the colours and a *sfumato* of the shapes are highlighted—the general form disappears in the process, but the details take centre stage in Swinburne's poetic project.

Detail becomes the ferment of the autopoietic machine, and embodies a moment of poetic eclipse, where the narration seems to come to a halt. This creates a breathing space as well as dimension and depth. Swinburne's attention to detail

creates the illusion of a stasis and functions as a focal change, turning the poetic object into a multi-faceted, multi-layered artefact.

Graphic details: morbid ekphrases and deadly blasons

Another artefact that informs and influences Swinburne's poetry is the baroque reliquary. Swinburne's poetic descriptions are reminiscent of the Catholic, Renaissance trend (revived to some extent in mid-Victorian times) of enshrining body parts into a gilded and bejewelled case. The baroque aesthetic of the reliquary helps us understand the poetics of juxtaposition at play in Swinburne's poetry—ornamental details are superimposed to an object deemed in itself aesthetically morbid. We think particularly of the head of Catherine of Siena, which is showcased in the eponymous cathedral in Tuscany, in a flamboyant baroque décor. In his poem "Siena" published in the second volume of the *Poems and Ballads*, Swinburne refers to Catherine's charitable work with leprosy patients, in an image that vividly evokes her future reliquary:

> Where in pure hands she took the head
> Severed, and with pure lips still red
> Kissed the lips dead. (l.43-45)

The sharp contrast between the "pure lips still red" and the "lips dead" illustrates the baroque tension between decay and ornament, exemplified further in the aesthetic economy of the reliquary, which contrasts form and content in a radical manner that inspired Swinburne. Leprosy in particular is a leitmotiv in Swinburne's art, and "The Leper" is one of the poems that embodies best Swinburne's use of details in that Renaissance, relic-like fashion. It tells the tale of a young noblewoman desired by two men, whose body is consumed by leprosy. She is looked after by a clerk, one of the two suitors that she rejected. Even before the symptoms of the disease become visible, the desire and the jealousy felt by the clerk start to disintegrate the woman's body. She becomes a literal object of desire, and she becomes *detail,* as she embodies the very physical division that symbolises the vying desires of the two men. They desire the same object and if the object is not shareable, the common desire creates a conflict which becomes materialized on the object of desire (Girard 69). Mimetic rivalry destroys its object, and leprosy is the ultimate symptom of that rivalry. The woman loses her humanity, and she is reduced in the poem to being a series of disconnected details, an astute poetic representation of leprosy:

> Love bites and stings me through, to see
> Her keen face made of sunken bones.
> Her worn-off eyelids madden me,
> That were shot through with purple once. (stanza 27)

The dynamic of de-composition intrinsic to the poem is reminiscent of "Le Gâteau," a prose poem by Baudelaire, published in *Le Spleen de Paris* in 1869. The poetic voice recounts his encounter with two rambunctious children who just climbed a mountain. One of the children asks the narrative voice to give him a bit of his loaf of bread, which sparks jealousy in the other child. Ensues a violent battle over the precious snack:

> Le gâteau voyageait de main en main et changeait de poche à chaque instant ; mais, hélas ! il changeait aussi de volume ; et lorsqu'enfin, exténués, haletants, sanglants, ils s'arrêtèrent par impossibilité de continuer, il n'y avait plus, à vrai dire, aucun sujet de bataille ; le morceau de pain avait disparu, et il était éparpillé en miettes semblables aux grains de sable auxquels il était mêlé.

Here, in a similar motif to the one in "The Leper," the mimetic desire triggers the fragmentation of the coveted object. In "The Leper," Swinburne sets up a poetic system of de-composition in which leprosy itself is just a symptom: the woman ceases existing and is turned into a mere amalgamation of physical details, as many fragments only accentuated by the fascination of the poetic voice, and his fetish-like obsession with specific parts of the woman's body. When he describes the intercourse between the woman and his rival, he poetically activates the corporeal fragmentation that leprosy will worsen:

> He that had held her by the hair,
> With kissing lips blinding her eyes,
> Felt her bright bosom, strained and bare,
> Sigh under him, with short mad cries.
> Out of her throat and sobbing mouth
> And body broken up with love,
> With sweet hot tears his lips were loth
> Her own should taste the savour of,
> 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. (Stanzas 15-17)

The leper is here fabricated element by element through the expression of the desire of the clerk. The body parts are isolated ("the hair," "her eyes," "her bright bosom," "her throat," "sobbing mouth") and the enumeration culminates in the mention of her "body broken up," which underlines even further the process through which she is turning into a series of discontinuous details.

The meticulous description of the body is made visible by the almost autopsic de-composition of the body. The accumulation of details arguably adds a clinical dimension to the tone of the poem, which contributes to making the clerk's desire all the more out of place. The creation of such a poetic reliquary can only be achieved through the gradual division of the feminine poetic persona, which disintegrates as soon as it materialises in the body of the text.

A similar technique is used by the poet in "Faustine." The long poem, published in the second volume of the *Poems and Ballads* conjures up the historical figure of the eponymous character, empress of Rome and wife of Marcus Aurelius, whose reputation lives on long after her death, as an alluring yet destructive *femme fatale*. Throughout "Faustine," Swinburne establishes a double movement: the poem opens with the ekphrastic description of the empress's body, which seems to bring her back to life in the second half of the poem. The de-composition of every detail of the woman's features mirrors both her physical and moral degeneration, and it provides the reader with a singular change of perspective on the character. At first, the importance of ekphrastic detail gives the impression of a colossal figure, as the reader's experience of the description takes place at a large scale. Detail is the textual element that enables the process of decomposition undertaken by Swinburne:

> The shapely silver shoulder stoops,
> Weighed over clean
> With state of splendid hair that droops
> Each side, Faustine.
>
> […]
>
> Bright heavy brows well gathered up:
> White gloss and sheen;
> Carved lips that make my lips a cup
> To drink, Faustine,
>
> Wine and rank poison, milk and blood,
> Being mixed therein
> Since first the devil threw dice with God
> For you, Faustine.
> ("Faustine", ll. 5-8, ll.13-20)

The detailed description of the character's gradually decaying body is activated through the use of ambivalent words such as "carved" (l. 16) which evoke the lexical fields of both artistic creation and physical corruption. The mirrored image of the poet's and the woman's bodies pictures a receptacle—"a cup to drink," "mixed therein," a poetic artefact that the ekphrasis helps materialise as a static object rather

than a living subject. Static, however, is not the most accurate epithet to describe the final product of Swinburne's poetic description, as the dynamics of decomposition still animate the lifeless body of the empress. The morbid description of Faustine's body is best exemplified in the sixteenth stanza:

> As if your fed sarcophagus
> Spared flesh and skin,
> You come back face to face with us,
> The same Faustine.
> (ll.61-65)

The attention to the details of the decayed body enables the eventual summoning of the character, which is here activated by the chorus-like ending of the stanza (repeated with variation throughout the poem) culminating with the haunting invocation of "Faustine." The idea of sameness ("The same Faustine") is here particularly productive, as it establishes a textual connection between the *decomposed* and *recomposed* versions of Faustine. The dissolution of the body is highlighted in the first couplet of the stanza, with the semantic duplication of consumption. "Sarcophagus" (l.61) semantically echoes "fed" and "flesh" on the next line, as it comes from Greek elements *σαρκ-* and *-φάγος,* which respectively mean "flesh" and "eating." This idea of duplication resonates once again in the phrase "face to face" on line 64.

The final evocation of Faustine is made all the more powerful that it is the result of an intricate sound play in the first three lines of the stanza. On a phonetic level, it is worth noting that a similar double movement of decomposition/re-composition materialises itself in the fabric of the text. The opulent alliteration in *f* harbingers the imperial initial: "as if," "fed," "sarcophagus," "flesh," "face to face." A similar sibilant alliteration ("sarcophagus," "spared," "skin," "face to face," "us") continues to sketch the name of Faustine. Very much like a form of phonetic ekphrasis, the phonemes that constitute the name of the empress are present, disjointedly, before the full name is uttered, and so to speak, her full name appears to the reader as *details* before the full picture is available. In a quasi-Ozymandian fashion, the mythical figure of the queen seems to gradually emerge, initially incomplete, from the dust of time. The effect on the reader is a form of phonetic "hallucination"—to echo Eliot's formula, when he describes Swinburne's verse as a "hallucination of meaning" (Eliot, 165)—that precedes figuration. This phonetic play on fragments displays yet another layer of the double-movement of *decomposition/re-composition* orchestrated by the poet.

Throughout the poem, Swinburne develops a double decomposition that is reminiscent of the poetic form of the blason, which appeared in France in the late Middle Ages and was specifically popularised in the XVIth century by Clément Marot, among others. Through the meticulous description of each feature of the beloved, the blason canonically makes use of an ekphrastic decomposition of the person's body or face. By associating this poetic de-composition to physical decomposition, Swinburne creates a diffracted version of the traditional form, a sort of morbid blason, in which ekphrasis becomes autopsy.

Details of a poetic re-composition

References to the French blason are ubiquitous in Swinburne's work, and his focus on poetic decomposition and detail can also be analysed through his Baudelairian intertextuality. One of the most emblematic poems of that intertext is probably "Ave Atque Vale," composed by Swinburne as a eulogy for the late French poet. If Swinburne's 1866 *Poems and Ballads* expanded and broadened the aesthetic explorations of decomposition exemplified by "Une charogne" in the *Fleurs du mal,* it is another type of decomposition that Swinburne resorts to in "Ave Atque Vale". As Yopie Prins explains: "The repetition of Baudelaire's corpse in both his and Swinburne's corpus allows both poets to imagine an 'afterlife' for their work in terms of future readers" (Prins, 125). The poetic effect of "repetition" is achieved through a minute description, which is reminiscent of the poetical trope of the blason. The elegy, much like the traditional blason, functions as a microscopic exploration of the various body parts of the subject under scrutiny. On a technical level as well, the poem is made up of eighteen stanzas of eleven lines and also follows the model of the mediaeval blason.

In "Ave Atque Vale," the decomposition of the body is associated to a new manifestation of the soul that does not express itself in an intangible fashion, but through the details of the description. This movement of the soul participates in the general movement of the poem, that of a disjunction of the various details of the body.

After the description of the general movement of decomposition undergone by the body of Baudelaire, Swinburne dwells on specific details of the poet's face in the fifth stanza:

> It is enough: the end and the beginning
> Are one thing to thee, who art past the end.

> O hand unclasped of unbeholden friend,
> For thee no fruits to pluck, no palms for winning,
> No triumph and no labour and no lust,
> Only dead yew-leaves and a little dust.
> O quiet eyes wherein the light saith nought,
> Whereto the day is dumb, nor any night
> With obscure finger silences your sight,
> Nor in your speech the sudden soul speaks thought,
> Sleep, and have sleep for light.

Baudelaire is described as a transcendent figure, whose transcendence is only made possible through death ("the end and the beginning / Are one thing to thee, who are past the end"). Just like the figure of Sappho, who is present between the lines of the poem (and throughout the Swinburnian-Baudelairian intertext), Baudelaire is described as belonging to another dimension, separated from the material world. The importance of the anatomical details of the poet's corpse, introduced by apostrophes ("O quiet eyes," "O hand unclasped") overlap with the mention of other body parts introduced as metaphorical elements ("nor any light/ With obscure finger"). The detailed anatomical description of the body is continued throughout the poem, for instance through use of the homophonic term "palms" in the next stanza ("For thee no fruits to pluck, no palms for winning"), which further accentuates the general movement of the passage, and its ambiguous double dynamic of anatomical decomposition and re-integration into the world. Detailed description seems to activate a fragmentation of the body, but also its transcendent atomic redistribution.

In a movement similar to the one we analysed through the sea anemones of the "Garden of Cymodoce," whose infinitesimal, negligible individual movements participate in an infinite, almost cosmic, movement, the insistence on the details of Baudelaire's remains enables Swinburne to stress his poetic immortality. As Thomas J. Brennan remarks:

> The logic of "Ave Atque Vale" is not one of Oedipal rivalry with the dead but one
> in which the dead and the living represent moments in a collective flow of desire
> that precedes their organization into individual and autonomous subjects.
> (Brennan, 254)

Baudelaire is made present in the body of the text through his state of decomposition, which enables Swinburne to precisely incorporate him into a broader poetic intertext, and ultimately into posterity. The review of the anatomical details of the poet enables Swinburne to make him join what Peter Sacks called "a community of poets who sing and have sung with the same voice" (Sacks, 207-208). The

commonality of the anatomical details anchors the poet's existence in the material world, and their disintegration make him reach a dimension elegiac transcendence.

Furthermore, on an intertextual level, it is worth mentioning that the more the corpse decomposes, the more the literary corpus becomes visible in the text, especially in the tenth stanza:

> Not thee, O never thee, in all time's changes,
> Not thee, but this the sound of thy sad soul,
> The shadow of thy swift spirit, this shut scroll
> I lay my hand on, and not death estranges
> My spirit from communion of thy song—
> These memories and these melodies that throng
> Veiled porches of a Muse funereal—
> These I salute, these touch, these clasp and fold
> As though a hand were in my hand to hold,
> Or through mine ears a mourning musical
> Of many mourners rolled.

Unable to hold Baudelaire's hand, Swinburne replaces it with a scroll ("this shut scroll / I lay my hand on") which symbolically establishes a connection with the hand of the dead poet ("as though a hand were in my hand to hold"). Physical contact is not possible anymore, and connection becomes accessible only through the work of the late artist. As Peter Sacks highlights it in his Freudian interpretation of the poem, Swinburne finds in the physical literary object a substitute to Baudelaire, who becomes re-materialised into his art (Sacks 208). Dismembered, decomposed, detailed to the point of disintegration through the elegiac blason, Baudelaire is finally reincorporated into the text in this new form.

Swinburne's attention to detail enables him to create a constant change in the form, which articulates itself around the play on de-composition/recomposition which underpins the structure of the poem, which also subtly re-places it in the Baudelairian intertext, through the use of subtle references to the French poet. As Rosemary Lloyd explains, Swinburne does not quote or translate Baudelaire into the new poem, but he "incorporates him by linguistic stealth" (Lloyd, 194). This translinguistic interplay is particularly visible in the seventeenth (and second-to-last) stanza:

> Sleep; and if life was bitter to thee, pardon,
> If sweet, give thanks; thou hast no more to live;
> And to give thanks is good, and to forgive.
> Out of the mystic and the mournful garden
> Where all day through thine hands in barren braid
> Wove the sick flowers of secrecy and shade,
> Green buds of sorrow and sin, and remnants grey,
> Sweet-smelling, pale with poison, sanguine-hearted,
> Passions that sprang from sleep and thoughts that started,

> Shall death not bring us all as thee one day
> Among the days departed?

In this stanza, Baudelaire's textual presence is teeming between the lines, in numerous small details that are reminiscent of the French poet's writing. In the fifth line of the stanza, the reader can thus make out a reference to the *Fleurs du mal* ("the sick flowers of secrecy and shade"), in an amalgamation of terms that echoes both Baudelaire and the introduction to *Rappacini's Daughter* by Gautier.

The incorporation of this condensed version of the Baudelairian aesthetic is reduced by Swinburne to what could come across as a mere detail, a mere touch in his own poem. But it is arguably in this detail that the whole dynamic of the poem resides, as it gives the elegy the aspect of some mediumistic communication with the late poet. Through his use of detail, activated by the format of the blason and intensified by the stealthy game of micro-reference, Swinburne elaborates a mode of writing that makes him the vessel of another artist's voice. Intertextuality is made possible by the attention to repetition, modulation, and a meticulous de-composition of the poetic hypotext.

Through his interest in detail, Swinburne illustrates the principle of difference/repetition as defined by Deleuze (Deleuze 81), more precisely in its aspect of "active synthesis" (Deleuze 82-84). The poet builds a complex system of resonance and re-composition which reactivates, in the form of echoes, connections that "transcend spatial position and time successions" (Deleuze 84). The movement of de-composition/re-composition in Swinburne's project belongs to a larger literary project of literary archeology, which the poet engineers as a series of discreet details which writing and rewriting connect in a new way. Rather than being merely distracting, diluting elements, details appear as the binder that fluidifies and smoothens the whole.

In Swinburne's work, attention to detail brings to light an aesthetic awakening that was to be explored and broadened by the modernists, both in the form and in the substance. Pound gathered the limbs of Osiris, in a way that is reminiscent of Swinburne collecting isolated fragments from Baudelaire or Sappho, emblematic elements of the art of his predecessors that will transmute into *details* within the new piece. Such details become the ingredients of a diachronic, polyphonic poetic art, which acknowledges micro-recycling as one of the driving forces of poetic creation.

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