METRICAL DISCIPLINE: ALGERNON SWINBURNE
ON 'THE FLOGGING-BLOCK'

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In 1909 The Eton College Chronicle announced the delivery of 'a great wreath of ilex and laurel' to the grave of Algernon Charles Swinburne. Inscribed 'with grateful homage from Eton' and two lines from an ode composed by Swinburne himself as homage to the school, the laurel wreath confirmed his status as England's unofficial poet laureate (Anonymous 1909, 471). Swinburne had been commissioned to write 'Eton: An Ode', celebrating the four hundred and fifteenth anniversary of the foundation of the school and predicting its future fame: 'when four hundred more and fifty years have risen and shone and set, / Bright with names that men remember, loud with names that men forget, / Haply here shall Eton's record be what England finds it yet' (Swinburne 1904, 6.191–3). But if Swinburne was to be numbered among the names that men remember, it would be not only in the official history of 'Eton's record' but also in the unofficial history recorded by Swinburne in 'Eton: Another Ode'. The self-conscious parody of this (unpublished) palinode gives us a glimpse of the other side of Eton — its backside:

Dawn smiles on the fields of Eton, and wakes from slumber her youthful flock,
Lad by lad, whether good or bad: alas for those who at nine o'clock
Seek the room of disgraceful doom, to smart like fun on the flogging block.

Swish, swish, swish! O I wish, I wish I'd not been late for lock-up last night!
Swish, that mill I'm bruised from still (I couldn't help it — I had to fight)
Makes the beast (I suppose at least) who flogs me flog me with all his might.

'Tell me, S—e, does shame within burn as hot (Swish! Swish!) as your stripes my lad,
Burn outside, have I tamed your pride? I'm glad to see how it hurts you — glad —
Swish! I wish it may cure you. Swish! Get up. By jove, what a dose I've had.
In the 'swish' and 'burn' of the boy's body on Eton's notorious flogging block, the name of Swinburne ('S—e') is made legible in 'stripes' on his posterior, and recorded for posterity as the poet laureate of Victorian flagellomania.

Now that we have arrived at Swinburne's centenary, it may be time to look back at this history from another perspective. Surveying new trends in Swinburne studies, David Riede regrets that 'a Swinburne icon for our times could only be a parodic version of the flamboyant sexual rebel of the 1860s, and is probably not devoutly to be wished for by more 'passionate Swinburneans' who are more interested in seeing justice done to his complex and challenging poetry' (Riede 2010, 170). But the extensive corpus of Swinburne's flagellant writing—in poetry, prose, dramas, letters—suggests a more complicated logic that should be of interest, even, and especially, to Swinburnians who are passionate about poetic form. As Steven Marcus already observed more than forty years ago in The Other Victorians, 'the literature of flagellation is on its surface a much more sophisticated kind of writing than ordinary pornography', because it 'makes use of a wider range of literary forms' (Marcus 1966, 252). To analyse the formal complications and implications of Swinburne's flagellant verse in particular, I propose to read 'on its surface a manuscript that is still unpublished: a series of flagellation fantasies set in a mock-pastoral school setting reminiscent of Eton, copied out by hand between the years 1862 and 1881, and compiled into a volume entitled The Flogging-Block: An Heroic Poem in a Prologue and Twelve Elogues by Algernon Charles Swinburne, with Illustrations by Simeon Solomon.' These poems are not a secondary by-product of Swinburne's poetics, but a remarkable body of writing that produces a reading of Algernon Swinburne's poetic signature, in reverse.

To preview this backward logic, we may begin by looking at the end of the manuscript (Figure 5.1). Here we find a table of contents that we would normally expect to see at the beginning, with a series of titles for Elogues (not all of which are actually included in this manuscript). The names that appear in each title are dramatically enumerated in a rhythmic repetition that is visually striking: after Algernon's Flogging in Eologue 1, there is Reginald's Flogging, Percy's Flogging, Willie's Flogging, Charlie's Flogging, Edward's Flogging, Frank's Flogging, Philip's Flogging, Arthur's Flogging, Freddy's Flogging, Leonard's Flogging, Edwin's Flogging. The substitutability of one name for another is evident, as Algernon is increasingly listed in every prelude and epilogue ('Epilogue to Algernon's Flogging,' 'Eologue to Algernon's Flogging,' 'Eologue to Algernon's Flogging,' etc. and so on in a seemingly infinite regress). Beginning and ending with 'Algeron', the flogging list revolves around his name as the generic name for any boy who has ever been or is about to be flogged. We might even read into, or out of, this name a mock etymology, combining the Greek verb algæ (meaning 'to feel pain') and the English preposition 'on': to be Algeron means to feel pain on the flogging block.

5.1 List of Elogues (final page of 'The Flogging-Block')

Arthur's Flogging — Algernon's Flogging. Prelude to Freddy's Flogging — Algernon's Flogging. Epilogue to Freddy's Flogging — Algernon's Flogging, and so on in a seemingly infinite regress). Beginning and ending with 'Algeron'; the flogging list revolves around his name as the generic name for any boy who has ever been or is about to be flogged. We might even read into, or out of, this name a mock etymology, combining the Greek verb algæ (meaning 'to feel pain') and the English preposition 'on': to be Algeron means to feel pain on the flogging block.
Swinburne’s algologia has been interpreted from multiple perspectives, as a biographical idiosyncrasy or a typical example of ‘the English Vice’, as a physiological symptom or a psychoanalytic phenomenon, as a pathological perversion or a subversion of sexual mores, as a pornographic performance or a social parody, as a cultural critique or a philosophy of sadomasochism, as a form of (homo)sexuality or a formalised aestheticism; as Rickky Rooksby concludes in his biography of Swinburne, ‘whatever the cause, Swinburne’s fixation should not be reduced to a simple formula’ (Rooksby 1997, 40). Focusing more on the effects than the causes, I approach ‘The Flogging-Block’ not through a ‘deep’ reading of the manuscript to discover the interiority of the poet or uncover the inner workings of his poetic psyche but through a reading that calls attention to the surface of his writing. The elaborate versification of Swinburne’s flogging poems plays out an allegory of rhythm that is inscribed on the body and made visible, as we shall see, in lines on the page. I further suggest that we read this rhythmic display – the beating of the body incorporated into the beat of the poem, and vice versa – as an initiation into the disciplinary measures of metre. I situate ‘The Flogging-Block’ within nineteenth-century metrical discourses, and especially debates about classical verse composition during Eton reform, in order to show how the beaten boy becomes an exemplary Eton boy: rather than learning verse by heart, he learns his lesson by having it written on his bottom. My reading of ‘(or on) The Flogging-Block’ concludes that this metrical discipline works according to a logic of externalisation rather than internalisation, reversing an abstract discourse about metre so that it can materialise, strikingly, in Swinburne’s own writing.

To date, ‘The Flogging-Block’ has been more written about than read. Although much of Swinburne’s flagellant writing was suppressed by Edmund Gosse and T. J. Wise in the early twentieth century, this manuscript is mentioned in passing by literary biographers from Lafourcade onward. Jean Overton Fuller dedicates a separate chapter to ‘The Flogging-Block’, describing in vivid detail how it is hidden in the Manuscripts Department of the British Museum, among papers ‘Reserved from Public Use’:

special application is necessary. If the application is successful, the manuscript is brought up in a wrapping of thick brown paper … The parcel is tied with tape, and the tape is secured by a special seal, in such a manner that it cannot be united, but has to be cut with scissors. The cutting can only be done by a senior official. One may watch. The seal falls with a plop. Inside the parcel there is, together with the manuscript, a list (to which one’s own name will be added) of previous persons for whom the manuscript was brought out. (Fuller 1968, 256–7)

As presented by Fuller, the scene of preparing for a reading of the manuscript anticipates the flogging ritual: although ‘one may watch’, a senior official does the unwrapping and cutting of the package, and the skin is revealed (in this case, a blue leather binding). With Fuller’s name added to the list of previous persons who have seen the manuscript, her voyeuristic reading corresponds to what she finds in the manuscript, namely ‘the boys’ voyeuristic pleasure in watching each other’s torment’ (258). After quoting some excerpts from ‘these awful pages’, Fuller concludes, ‘perhaps the British Museum authorities do well to keep the manuscript out of the public’s way’ (260). Is she suggesting that ‘The Flogging-Block’ should not be read at all? Or is there some other way to read what is written on these pages?

How to read ‘The Flogging-Block’ is a question raised by subsequent critics, including the imaginary dialogue scripted by Jerome McGann in Swinburne: An Experiment in Criticism. When one of his dramatis personae (‘Kernahan’) asserts that ‘no deep meanings lie concealed at its bottom (so to speak)’ (McGann 1972, 269), another critic (‘Murdock’) quotes passages from the manuscript to emphasise ‘the depth of impression Sade’s writing made on him’ (272), while a third critic (‘Wraatlaw’) emphasizes that Swinburne ‘objected to the gross details in Sade’ and wrote his flogging poems as a highly stylised performance, with ‘the mere idea of flagellation repetitively invoked and religiously presented at a high level of abstraction’ (280); a fourth critic (‘Mrs. Watts-Dunton’) claims in that ‘Swinburne’s flagellant verse, precisely because it is so scheratic, clarifies an aesthetic attitude specifically allied to the masochistically inclined personality’ (281). McGann’s experiment in criticism ventriloquises various ways of reading ‘The Flogging-Block’ – as the literary production of a parodist, a satirist, a sadist, a masochist – but without coming to one conclusion: ‘these patterns are discernible in all of Swinburne’s flagellant verse, the serious and the humorous alike’ (282).

To encourage more reading of a seemingly ‘minor’ literary corpus that remains largely unread and unknown (except perhaps among the most passionate Swinburnians, and connoisseurs of flagellation), the recent
Yale edition of Swinburne's Major Poems edited by McGann and Sligh includes a passage from Arthur's Flogging' (Swinburne 2004a, 418–20). Published in 1888 for The Whippingham Papers, this mock-heroic poem is not one of the 'eclogues' included in 'The Flogging-Block', but it suggests how we might learn to read Swinburne's manuscript. The flogging of Arthur is a Byronic parody (written in ottava rima, like Don Juan) that presents the body as a blank page marked by writing:

And harder still the birch fell on his bottom,
And left some fresh red letters there to read;
Weeks passed before the part inscribed forgot 'em,
The fleshy tablets, where the master's creed
Is written on boy's skin with birchen pen,
At each re-issue copied fair again.

(lines 115–200)

Written 'with birchen pen' on the skin are 'fresh red letters there to read', marking Arthur's bottom with lines like a poem: both body and poem become legible in letters that are 'red' or 'read' on 'fleshy tablets'. The body is disciplined according to prescribed rules that are strictly enforced by the creed (or screech) of the master, as a form of metrical discipline. In the strict versification of this poem, the beating of the birch is accentuated in the beats of accentual verse: 'and harder still the birch fell on his bottom', or perhaps (shifting the accent to 'on'), 'the birch fell on his bottom'. Through the repetition of the flogging, 'at each re-issue copied fair again', Arthur is made into a lesson-book for other boys to read as well:

The fair full page of white and warm young flesh
Was ruled across with long thick lines of red,
And lettered on the engraved backside with fresh
Large characters, by all boys to be read.

(lines 129–32)

The letters that materialise as 'large characters' on the 'engraved backside' of this boy allow him to be read as an exemplary character for 'all boys', including Swinburne himself (as the 'author' of Arthur). Thus 'Arthur's Flogging' exemplifies a poetic performance, in verse, of a reverse logic that turns the bottom into a surface for the inscription of metre, figured as rhythmic beating of the body and literalised in lines written on the page.

When we look at 'the fair full page' of 'The Flogging-Block' (more than a hundred pages of densely scribbled lines) we see how this poetic logic is repeated over and over with multiple variations in multiple scenes of flogging, 'at each re-issue copied fair again' in Swinburne's own handwriting. In his manuscript, the beating of the body is graphically visualised in letters, lines, stripes, and other marks that are figuratively 'red' and literally 'read' in black ink on white paper. This kind of visual reading is illustrated in a sketch by Simeon Solomon, insertec at the beginning of the manuscript (Figure 5.2). Entitled 'The Eve of the Birching', the sketch features the idealised faces of two boys who are, we assume, about to lose face in a flogging. Between them on a table is a long switch of birch twigs, placed next to a book that is opened, face down, with its back spine exposed. The juxtaposition of the birch and the book anticipates the flogging ritual as a scene of writing and reading, to be played out on the backside of the boys. As the instrument of punishment that will inscribe their bodies with the marks of a rhythmic beating, the birch turns into a writing implement like a pen that will leave its traces on the page.

Taking pleasure in the graphic visualisation of flogging, Solorzian and Swinburne liked to exchange flogging fantasies in their personal correspondence. Solomon wrote to Swinburne about 'the marks of many
Etonian rods’ to illustrate ‘the real merit and meaning of that instrument of delight’ and in response to ‘the recital of the boyish agonies you depicted in your last [letter]’, Solomon added his own vision to the scene: ‘I was doubled up with grief at the idea of so many tender posteriors quivering under the pitiless strokes of the rod’ (possibly late September 1869; Swinburne 1959–62, 2.32). In return for Swinburne’s writing, Solomon promised, ‘I will make you many drawings’, including a picture of ‘The Queen presenting rods to the Schoolmasters of the United Kingdom’ (Swinburne 1959–62, 2.33). They turned poems into pictures and pictures into poems during a period of friendship and artistic collaboration, described in further detail by Thais Morgan; she argues that the ‘pervasive male bodies’ in the work of Solomon and Swinburne reflect an emerging discourse about ‘perversity’ in Victorian England, but also ‘reverse’ this discourse into ‘an ever mobile eroticism, a “pervasive” play between fantasy and action, aesthetics and lifestyle’ (Morgan 1996, 81).

More than Solomon (who was later arrested for homosexual acts and ‘cut off’ by Swinburne), Swinburne played out this reversed discourse primarily in his flagellant writing, which circulated among other friends in Swinburne’s inner circle as well. When George Powell sent a photograph of the Eton flogging block to Swinburne, Swinburne wrote to him in a letter (5 October 1867): ‘I would give anything for a good photograph taken at the right minute – say the tenth cut or so – and doing justice to all sides of the question’, and he went on to imagine how he might visualise the flogging ritual himself: ‘If I were but a painter – I would do dozens of different fellows diversely suffering. There can be no subject fuller of incident, character, interest – realistic, modern, dramatic, intense, and vividly pictorial, palpitation: d’actualité. Do get some fellow with a turn for drawing to try it’ (Swinburne 1959–62, 1.265–6). By turning to flogging as a scene for writing and reading, the dramatic eulogues in ‘The Flogging-Block’ can be seen as Swinburne’s attempt to do at least a dozen ‘different fellows’ in his own versification, all of them ‘diversely suffering’ in poetry that is ‘dramatic, intense, and vividly pictorial’.

Following Solomon’s illustration, Swinburne’s manuscript begins with a prologue, entitled ‘The Flogging-Block: An Heroic Poem’, by Rufus Rodworthy Esq. (Algermon Claveron) With Annotations by Barebun Birchingham Esq. (Bertram Bellingham)” (Figure 5.3). Like ‘Arthur’s Flogging’ (which begins, ‘I sing of Arthur’s Flogging; I, who heard / The boy himself sing out beneath the birch’) the prologue is another mock-heroic poem, but this time written in heroic couplets in the style of Pope:

5.3 Page 1, ‘The Flogging-Block: An Heroic Poem’ (Prologue to ‘The Flogging-Block’)

I sing the Flogging-block. Thou, red-cheek’d Muse, Whose hand the blood ofsmarting boys imbues, Scholastic Dame, revered of State & Church, Whose lords to be have writhed beneath the Birch.

This invocation to the Muse is in the epic tradition of arma virumque cano ('arms and the man I sing'), with arma virumque ironically translated into the birch and the boy and canes translated into the song of the canes, and again (like ‘Arthur’s Flogging’) all this epic beating takes the form of
writing on the bocy. Rhyming with 'Muse', the verb 'embrues' can be read actively or passively, meaning both to 'stain' (as with blood) and to 'pierce' (as with 'a weapon piercing a part', an obsolete use listed in the OED), so that it remains ambiguous whether the hand that writes is passively stained with blood or actively piercing the body in order to draw blood. The same ambiguity is written into the epithet, 'red-cheek'd Muse', whose face red with shame is also the bottom red with pain; either way, this reddening is a mark of the flogging that we must learn to read as writing.

The didactic function of the prologue is underscored by a series of annotations that appear in four separate pages inserted into 'The Flogging-Block' (Figure 5.4). The first note, marked number 1 after 'Muse' in line 1, corresponds to remarks written by the fictional editor, the so-called Barebume Birchingham or Bertram Bellingham, who seems to be fixated on the marking of the bottom of the bocy (indeed, the doubling of his name seems to call attention to the two butt-cheeks exposed in the letter B). According to B. B., the red-cheek'd Muse is 'The Muse who presides over the ceremony of Flagellation & inspires the Song which attempts to celebrate the Flogging-Block... so stily'd from the Hue produced by the first Strokes of the Rod on the nether Cheeks of the Boy chastised - this nether Cheeks full broad & white' when first exposed to the Lash, but after a few good hearty Strokes (well applied with a good smart Rod) all suffused with a glowing Crimson'. In this pseudo-scholarly annotation, the muse that inspires the song is identified as a figure for writing, as she is 'so stily'd from the Hue of the blood that appears on the bottom: a blank writing surface that is 'full broad & white' at first, but gradually suffused with a glowing Crimson' by the strokes of the rod that are also the strokes of the pen. So also the blank page is filled with the strokes of the pen, turning the figure of red blood into black ink, line after line.

From the prologue we learn that the ceremony of flagellation is a necessary initiation rite for Lords and Bishops and Judges, but especially important for budding poets. Starting in line 10, the rhythmic repetition of the bocy is applied to the 'Poet's Bum' in particular. Here the word 'bocy' is repeated thirteen times, although this emphatic repetition also throws off the scansion of the lines, causing distress in all the right places:

And ere his Brow be ripe for Bays to come
Birch, Birch entwine the beardless Poet's Bum
Birch, Birch alone embrace his browning Part,}

If we look more closely at the manuscript (figure 5.3), we see additional marks inserted by B. B. in these lines: note (2) after the word 'entwine', note (3) after 'daily Birch', note (4) after 'hourly Birch', and note (5) after 'incessant Birch'. This compulsive counting of the strokes of the bocy is further
recounted by B. B. (see figure 5.4), who writes in note (4) that 'I have known a young Gentleman of good Family & good Parts severely Whipp'd no less than seven Times in one Day, receiving at each Bout eighteen smart Lashes on his bare Breech... his fault being, first, that he fail'd of saying his morning Lesson.' His remarks for note (4) go on (and on) for several pages to enumerate all seven floggings in detail, and conclude with a sentence in parentheses: 'This experience occur'd at School to Mr. A. Clavering (the Author of this Poem) on the Day on which he completed his fifteenth or sixteenth year.' At this point the annotations end, as even the compulsive annotator to the poem seems to lose count; B. B. never gets to note (5) on 'Birch, Birch, incessant birch,' but it has already become clear that the counting is an infinite series, for endless repetition.

The experience of infinite measure, like Kant's formalised account of the mathematical sublime, is a rite of passage into the metrical sublime. This is what young poets must learn from the Muse, if we follow the instructions for whipping on page two of the Prologue:

Thou that hast whipp'd so many a boyish Bard
So soundly, so often, & so hard,
(For chief the Stripling Son'stire's Breech invites
The full Performance of thy frequent Rites,
And most the Nurslings of the Muse require
The Lash that sets their Lyric Blood on Fire,
The Lash that ever when they cry keeps Time,
When Stroke to Stroke responds in glowing Rhyme,
And still the humbled Bottom hails the Rod sublime,
Till Heart & Head the rhythmic Lesson learn
From Wounds that redden & from Stripes that burn,
As Twig by Twig imprains 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.

In whipping 'so many a boyish Bard / So soundly, so often, & so hard', the Muse seems to rhythmicise their bodies, teaching them lash by lash and stroke by stroke to incorporate this rhythm until 'Heart & Head the rhythmic Lesson learn'. This rite of passage is also a passage into writing: the 'stripes that burn' are imprinted on the bottom as 'a Crimson sign', a graphic figure that turns the rhythmic lesson into metrical marks. Thus the invocation to the Flogging Muse uses the trope of flogging to proclaim the vocation of poets, who come into writing by being written upon. The prologue's function in 'The Flogging-Block' is not only to proclaim this trope but also to begin performing it, as the poem shifts from the third to the first person, and into the present tense. At this point, the Muse inspires a vision that repeats the primal scene of flogging:

She hears! She hears! Already on my Eyes
Scenes once but too familiar seem to rise,
Again I see, & shudder at my Doom.
The dark high Precinct of the Flogging-Room.

From the general principle of flogging 'so many a boyish bard', the poem now brings into view the flogging of one boy in particular:

But who is he, the bare-breasted Boy there kneeling? Who?
With visionary eye reversed I see
Myself in him, & gaze myself on me.
I see the Shirt drawn up, the Bottom bare;
The Bottom daily stripped & never spared;
I see my Stripes, I see the numerous Wounds
That prove what pain my Bum each morning feels.
I see my Breeches hanging loose about my Heels.

This moment of vicarious identification, identifying the boy and also identifying with the boy, happens through a backward look ('with visionary eye reversed I see') that places the 'I' in the same posture as the kneeling boy: his 'Bottom daily stripped' turns into a vision of 'my Stripes' on 'my Bum'.

The rhetorical doubling transforms the prologue into a performative utterance, as if experienced in the present moment. The beating of the body is performed in the beat of the poem, in a series of strongly accented lambs:

I feel once more each Twig, each Knot, each Bud,
Sting my soft Flesh & fire my fevered Blood:
I feel the Stripes behind me burn & throb;
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.

In the repetition of verbs beginning with 'I' (a stroke of the pen we could read as a metrical mark), each verb is like another stroke of the birch,
lashing the body to make it feel pain, and creating a rhythmic response in turn. To make this rhythm legible, it is literally inscribed in 'Stripes' on the body and figuratively on the page and, vice versa, it is literally inscribed in lines on the page and figuratively on the body: the graphic inscription makes body and poem interchangeable, each a figure for the other.

These lines are visualised not only horizontally in the poem's salliation but vertically in the left margin of this page in the manuscript (Figure 5.3a). Here we see three lines that run perpendicular to the lines of the poem, scribbled in small letters that are barely legible: the first line is 'C.A -' that stands for 'Cl - v - r - ng (Alg - m - n)' and the next two lines are crossed out. This annotation is supposedly provided by 'B. B.' whose earlier explanatory notes have already identified Mr. A. Clavering as 'Author of this Poem.' But of course the handwriting reveals author and annotator to be one and the same, making the authorial signature visible as a function of marking. Simultaneously scored out and underscored by heavy black lines, the name is emphasised by its placement in parentheses and by dashes that strip away the vowels in the name, as if the very name is marked by stripes from the flogging: Alg - m - n.

Striking out the vowels, this stripped-down name is repeated further down on the same page of the manuscript, in the body of the poem (Figure 5.3b). As the flagellation allows the poem to visualise the boy who is being beaten, his name becomes legible in the signature left by the strokes of the birch on his bottom. It is Algernon himself, predetermined by his very name to suffer pain on the flogging block:

His Flagellation is but now begun:
He'll have enough to cry for ere it's done.
The Birch itself delights to whip young Alg - m - n.
I hear my Cousin whispering to my Brother -
'This was a good tough Rod - but see the other!
See, Charlie, what a little, fresh, sappy one!
I call your Brother's Flagellation Fun:
I like to see the Birch-Twigs tickling Alg - m - n.'

The reiteration of Alg - m - n in quotation marks makes it possible to read the scene of flogging as a scene of writing, suspended between the first and the third person: what 'I hear' and what 'I see' is both identification of, and identification with, the body being written upon. The reversibility of the third and first person in the name of Algernon produces a vicarious logic that also allows the reader of the poem to enter
into, and identify with, the scene of flogging as if in the second person: 'I call your Brother's Flagellation Fun.' Algernon's incorporation of this rhythmic lesson thus proves to be anyone's and everyone's initiation into the disciplinary measures of metre, demonstrating how to make 'the Youngster's Bottom smart,' painfully but thoroughly educated in metrical discipline.

ETON REFORM

The flogging of schoolboys was a controversial subject, widely debated but also celebrated within nineteenth-century discourses about educational reform, corporal punishment, and sexual flagellation that Ian Gibson has surveyed in *The English Vice*. Focusing on Eton in particular as an iconic site in the Victorian imagination, Gibson's chapter on 'Eton, the Birch, and Swinburne' reproduces a photograph of the flogging block in 'the Library' at Eton (Gibson 1978: figure 12). With three large birches leaning against the back wall, the flogging block is placed beneath a painting of a classical amphitheatre, and framed by wooden benches on either side. In this highly theatrical setting, countless boys from the best British families lost face by seeing their bottoms in a highly formalised ritual, enacted before an audience of pupils, who came to witness an event where every word—stern command, plea for mercy, merciless reply, cry of woe, tearful repentance—was scripted. The performance of subjection to this form of discipline, both real and imagined, was central to the formation of character for Eton boys and the very idea of 'the Eton boy'.

This Etonian scenario was obsessively played out in the popular press, which circulated so-called 'memorials' of the floggers and the flogged at Eton, alongside newspaper reports, letters to the editor, eye-witness accounts, photographs, pornographic images, and comical cartoons, including a caricature of James Lee Joyce in *Vanity Fair*: the 'Lower Master' of Eton is depicted with a birch in hand, while the flogging block looms in the background (Gibson 1978: figure 14). This cartoon was published on the occasion of his retirement in 1889 along with an ironic tribute to the man who 'handled the birch with an unsparring hand' and thus 'left a lasting impression on many generations of boys' (quoted by Gibson 1978, 125). One of the boys on whom Joyce seems to have left a lasting impression was Swinburne. At the tender age of twelve, the young Algernon was lodged at Eton with Joyce for his Assistant Master, and later in life Swinburne recalled 'a swishing that I had the marks of for more than a month', delivered by a 'stunning tutor' whose 'pet subject was metre'. Gibson speculates that this tutor may have been Joyce, but, if so, the memory is also transformed by Swinburne's metrical imagination: 'I firmly believe that my ear for verses made me rather a favourite'; he wrote, boasting that 'of all the swishings I ever had up to seventeen and over, I never had one for a false quantity in my life'; but 'I made it up in arithmetic, so my tutor never wanted reasons for making rhymes between his birch and my body' (c. 10 February 1863; Swinburne 1859–62, 1.788).

Swinburne's imaginary incorporation of metre reflects, and reflects on, a broader cultural imaginary in which Eton was associated with metrical as well as corporal discipline. As part of their classical education, Eton boys were given weekly assignments in Greek and Latin verse composition, including the translation of English poetry into classical metres; by the sixth form they were composing their own verse in epic hexameters as well as elegiacs, iambics, Alcaics, Sapphics, and so on. But it was a difficult discipline, as Swinburne later remembered, or perhaps imagined, 'a contemporary of mine at Eton, who after two hours' labour was safely delivered of a single hexameter—only unhappily it had seven feet instead of six. The consequences in that case were tragic' (20 April 1880; Swinburne 1859–62, 4.136). Pupils were flogged if they did not know the right rhythms, and even if they knew them too well, according to another anecdote recounted by Swinburne about his youthful attempt to write Galliambics. Having learned this metrical scheme from an Eton edition of Catullus, prepared for the 'young mind', Swinburne claimed that 'I tried...to do my week's verses in it once, and my tutor said it was no metre at all...and the consequences were tragic' (Autumn 1864; Swinburne 1859–62, 1.110). In Swinburne's memory (or fantasy) of this painful episode, his metrical experiment with a 'hard' classical metre led to a hard beating: 'And then I showed my verses indignantly (after the catastrophe) to another master, and he said they were very good, and there was but one small slip in them, hard as the metre was;...but that did not heal the cuts or close the scars imprinted on the mind and body' (Swinburne 1859–62, 1.110). Even more than cuts and scars, what was 'imprinted on the mind and body' by flagellation was an idea of metre itself as a painful pleasure.

Instruction in classical verse at Eton was at the upper end of a widespread pedagogical practice in schools of all levels, where students were compelled to memorise poems for elocution and recitation and punished if they failed. Catherine Robson has argued that the affective experience
of pedagogical beating" became part of the popular transmission of poetry in Victorian England, where "the compulsorily memorised poem inserted itself into individuals and established its beat in sympathy with, or in counterpoint to, their bodily rhythms" (Robson 2005, 157). According to this argument, the internalisation of metre depended on literalising the 'beat' of English accentual verse. But this figurative incorporation of rhythm was complicated by the compulsory memorisation of classical metres, since quantitative verse was artificially superimposed on accentual verse. Rather than regulating the rhythms of the body, what was at stake in the rarefied practice of classical verse composition at Eton (and elsewhere) was the regulation of metre itself, as an abstract discipline and an elaborate metrical discourse that was widely circulated and hotly debated in Victorian England. In Essays on Liberal Education (1868) for example, F. W. Farrar published his essay, 'On Greek and Latin Verse-Composition as a General Branch of Education', as an extended polemic against 'compulsory verse-making'. He complained about "the mysteries of the dreadful drill" and asked how any student could possibly benefit from 'the Latin which he endeavours to torture into rhythm' (Farrar 1868, 212–13). As an advocate of educational reform, Farrar maintained that classical verse composition was a useless discipline, without any practical ends to justify the means: "As for the disciplinary value of verses, is it necessary that discipline should be so purely inestimable?" he asked (217), rejoicing that "a serious effort is now being made to emancipate English boys from a yoke whose "cruel absurdity" neither they nor their fathers have been able to bear" (216–17).

While some condemned the uses and abuses of this metrical exercise, it was vigorously defended by others, including William Johnson (later known as 'Cory'),. Like Joweson, Johnson became another legendary Eton figure, but more known for his interest in versification than his insistence on flagellation. He published his own poems in English, Latin, and Greek and also several manuals for students on learning to read and write Latin lyric verses and Greek iambic verses. Johnson had attended Eton as a pupil and, when he later returned as a tutor, he taught classics during Swinburne's years at Eton. In a pamphlet entitled Hints for Eton Mates, he maintained that exercises in translating English poetry into Greek and Latin were an important discipline for the educational development of boys at Eton:

I believe every Cambridge man hates the passages which he has to translate, and they are indeed too often ugly and dull; but I trust it is not so at Eton. I may be deceived, but I hope I have very often set verses to be turned or 'reduced' (as they say of engraving) from really attractive and beautiful passages of English poets, which have struck and stirred some boys, and have given them the wish to read the books... in particular I think it worth while to say that I have had great success in setting passages of English verse for Latin hexameters. (Johnson 1898, 7–8)

The rhythms of English poetry 'which have struck and stirred some boys' were thus transposed by classical verse composition into a metrical abstraction: a disciplinary exercise in the 'reduction' of poetic form that could be used to form and reform the character of the pupil. During a surge of debates about educational reform in the 1860s, Johnson went to great lengths to explain the purpose of 'formal' education at Eton. In two pamphlets published in 1861, Eton Reform and Eton Reform II, Johnson addressed critics who had accused the school of catering to 'clever boys' without offering practical instruction for the average pupil. 'It is well known to all who have been at Eton within the last ten years,' he replied, 'that boys who are not brilliant versifiers... take considerable pains, and often with success, to do well' (Johnson 1861, 9–10), although the reason for taking such pains often required some clarification:

As soon as boys are old enough to ask the question, 'Why do we learn these lessons?'—and they do ask it very early in their career—it strains the ingenuity of grown-up people to explain to them the bearing of dead languages upon their after-life, and, as a matter of fact, they are bribed to learn things that they take no interest in, and obstinately believe to be useless, by the great and peculiar social pleasures of school and college, which they would have to forego if they exchanged Greek and Latin for professional and practical studies. (Johnson 1861, 11)

Not only was the cultivation of classical metres rewarded by the 'social pleasures' of Eton culture, but according to Johnson there was a fundamental 'instinct' at the bottom of verse-making' that made it a creative pleasure: 'Even the dullest boy has some satisfaction in turning out a verse that will scan and construe. In composition we have the required machinery for eliciting the energies of ordinary minds' (11).

Indeed, in Johnson's mind, the 'required machinery' of such classical discipline was the very foundation of a liberal education, as he went on
to argue in his essay, ‘On the Education of the Reasoning Faculties’ (commissioned by Farrar for inclusion in Essays on Liberal Education). Here Johnson defended the traditional method of teaching Greek and Latin verse composition as a form of moral education. ‘The classical method, characterised by accuracy, by constraining and chastening discipline, and by some consciousness of progress in the acquirement of craftsman’s skill, we would, if possible, apply to what we have called, for the sake of convenience, moral philosophy’ (Johnson 1868, 395). By learning to write in classical metres, pupils could discipline the mind and cultivate greater refinement of expression, as Johnson found that ‘the Latin verse of young people... is more honest, more sincere, than their English rhymed verse’ (329). Precisely because quantitative metre was learned as an abstract pattern, it could reform both the mind and the body, through an imposition of metrical discipline that was different from accentual metre already incorporated into the body by habit or convention.

Swinburne, who excelled at classical verse composition, turned these various ideas about Eton form and reform into an extravagant performance of his own ideas about poetic form. Looking back on his own metrical education at Eton, Swinburne wrote: ‘As to my quantities and metre and rule of rhythm and rhyme, I defy castigation. The head master has sent me up for good on that score. Mr. Tennyson tells me in a note that he “envies me” my gift that way. After this approval I will not submit myself to the birch on that account’ (c. 20 April, Swinburne 1859–62, 1.121). Nevertheless Swinburne loved to imagine submission to the birch, and his personal correspondence is peppered with so-called memories of pupils who suffered through metrical discipline at Eton. In a letter to Charles Howell (18 November 1870), with whom he liked to exchange flogging fantasies, Swinburne inserted an imaginary letter addressed to himself, concerning the plight of two fictional cousins at Eton:

My dear Alg, I must tell you about the young un – it’s worse than ever this half – He was swished 3 times last Friday & once every day the week before... My tutor told him the other day he’d be turned into a birch some day at this rate – he says he shall give the subject for verses to our division next week – Ovid’s Metamorphoses you know – & that style of thing – I wish you’d do some for me. (Swinburne 1859–62, 2.130–4)

Turning this ‘urgent’ plea to his own pleasure, Swinburne commented to Howell: ‘The Ovidian metamorphosis of a boy into a birch-tree is really a sweet subject for Latin verse, I think I shall try it’ (2.134). According to a metamorphic logic perhaps more Swinburnian than Ovidian, the perfect subject of this classical verse composition would be the figurative incorporation of its metrical form, as if (by transforming what in classical metrical theory would be called the ‘locus’ on the ‘arsis’) the birching of the boy could turn the beat of English accentual verse into Latin metre.

The person who responded most enthusiastically to Swinburne’s version of Etonian discipline was his cousin, Mary Gordon Leith, with whom he shared a keen interest in stories (and a personal history) of flagellation. In their correspondence now published in Unpublished Letters, we learn that he sent her a book about Eton and she replied: ‘how many changes seem to have been made of late, tho’ let us hope that it may never see a change in one respect & that it may be said of the birch as of the school “Floreat!”’ (29 January 1892, Swinburne 2004b, 3.47). In contrast to Eton reformers who would do away with corporeal punishment, she and Swinburne imagined the practice of birching – the very idea of it, as may be said of the birch – as the highest form of aesthetic education. ‘Thus she followed up in another private letter (written in code, transposing initial letters):

Cow, my nounis do you meanly rear to stand there & tell me that the time-honoured & traditional pude of punishment is disused at Eton? I am more upturned & pset than you can imagine. I fear ‘Eton’s record’ will certainly not be &c (vide An Ode &c) & that we may expect to see a rapid derradence of England’s scarest ghoool. (2 February 1893; Swinburne 2004b, 3.50–1)

Ironically reversing the logic of Swinburne’s celebratory ode to Eton, Leith suggests that the ‘disuse’ of birching as a traditional mode of punishment would erase ‘Eton’s record’ and lead to the decline of England’s greatest school. According to a more perverse logic (as Swinburne went on to write in ‘Eton: Another Ode’, dedicated ‘To M.’), continued use of birching would be a better example of Eton reform: a form of metrical discipline that could leave a mark of distinction on the school, and its pupils.

SWINBURNE

In ‘The Flogging-Block’ we can see how Swinburne self-consciously plays out, and plays on, different disciplinary regimes in mid-Victorian England. Debates about the uses of metrical education at Eton were closely linked
to the discourses documented by Gibson in *The English Vice*, about the use and abuse of corporal punishment in sexual flagellation and juvenile flogging in schools. But in his recent book *In Praise of the Whip*, Niklaus Largier calls into question 'the commonplace that the proverbial predilection of the English for flagellation can be explained by the educational methods of English schools or by Victorian sexual morality', and he argues that 'this cannot be the sole form of explanation, since it misappropriates the genuine productive moment in the history of flagellation' which according to Largier appears as 'the analogue of poetic writing' (Largier 2007, 362). In pursuing a new history of voluntary flagellation, Largier argues that Swinburne's flagellant verse should be read not as 'pathology' but as a 'poetological' reflection:

Swinburne's rhetorical strategy is more complicated than might be supposed from a first glance at the apparently simple texts, for it always emphasizes the moment of staging. What is described, what is narrated, is not merely punishment with the whip, not merely the sight of the rod that strikes the naked buttocks, but the staging of this action as a ritual on the 'flogging block' in which the same arousal that lies at the basis of poetic creation takes shape and becomes visible. (Largier 2007, 354)

Indeed, Swinburne's rhetorical strategy is more complex than it may first appear. But to go beyond a 'first glance at the apparently simple texts', we may need not to read deeper into the text of 'The Flogging-Block' but rather to look more closely at the surface of the manuscript, as a further poetological reflection on the process by which Swinburne's poetic creation takes shape and becomes visible.

The eclogues in 'The Flogging-Block' are presented as dramatic scripts, the first of which is entitled 'Algernon's Flogging' (Figure 5.6). The words are more difficult to decipher here, as Swinburne disliked writing by hand; indeed, on the copying of passages meted out as punishment at Eton, Swinburne wrote: 'Birching is better than the cursed system of impositions—"poena" is the Roman phrase—is manlier and wholsomer. The other makes all writing hateful and tedious and gives hours of discomfort instead of minutes of torture' (13 February 1868; Swinburne 1939–62, 1.291). To set the imaginary stage for writing this eclogue, Swinburne copied out directions at the top of the page: the 'scene' is 'the public flogging room' and the cast of characters includes a Schoolmaster, Algernon, a chorus of schoolboys, and The Rod. At the start of the

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5.6 Page 1, 'Algernon's Flogging' (Eclogue I from 'The Flogging-Block')

flogging ritual, the Master sternly commands one of the boys to 'take Algernon's breeches down' and announces that he will 'give Master Alg a thorough good flogging':

A thorough good flogging shall Algernon get.
His posteriors have never been whipped enough yet,
So in sight of his equals in age & superior
I'll do justice on Algernon's naked posteriors.
The flogging that follows turns out to be poetic justice, with the schoolmaster striking just the right musical response out of the body of Algernon. Here Swinburne's versification turns Algernon's flogging into a perfectly metrical performance:

O, don't hit so hard, sir! I don't sit - I won't
O, sir, the birch hurts me so awfully - don't!
O please, sir, don't always hit just the same part!
O, sir, you don't know how you're making me smart!

In these lines, the letter o that was struck out of Alg - rn - n in the Prologue reappears in the repetition of O in response to each lash, making Algernon increasingly visible and audible as a body disciplined by metre.

The dramatisation of metrical discipline in this manuscript is even more graphic several pages later, where Algernon is scripted to say 'Oh!' every time the Rod says 'Swish!' (Figure 5.7). The emphasis on the very word 'Swish!' recalls a passage in Swinburne's novel A Year's Letters in which a flogging episode is narrated by one schoolboy to another:

Reginald recited this pleasing episode with a dreadful unctuous. No description can express the full feathery sound of certain words in his mouth; he talked of cuts with quite a lickerish accent, and gave the word swish with a twang in which the hissing sound of a falling birch, or the clear hard ringing noise of a tough stroke on bare flesh, became sharply audible. (Swinburne 1974, 24)\[16\]

But in moving from a description in prose to this performance in verse, the manuscript of 'The Flogging-Blow' makes the words more visible than audible, as we see how Algernon's rhythmic flogging materialises graphically as an effect of metrical writing. Here the flogging is measured out like two hexameter lines that are diagonally placed across the page: in the first diagonal line, the Rod begins with 'Swish' and Algernon follows with 'Oh!' (repeated six times), while the second diagonal line marks a reversal, as Algernon begins with 'Oh!' and the Rod follows with 'Swish'. Having memorised the metre, Algernon now anticipates the lash even before it strikes, as if its rhythm has already been incorporated into his body.

Through the example of Algernon, the chorus of schoolboys watching the scene also learns to read his rhythmic lesson as a metrical pattern: 'Oh, isn't his bottom a pattern when stripped?' one observes with relish, while another remarks: 'You can see the rod's marks all down Algernon's back.' And indeed, the marking of his bottom is graphically presented in the manuscript, at the very end of the eulogy (Figure 5.8). After reading in the stage directions that 'the Master gives Algernon's bottom a final cut', we see an emphatically final 'SWISH!' that leaves Algernon 'writhing with pain'. This writhing (and this writing) is made visible in 'Algernon's Flogging', not only in the lines left by the birch on his bottom but in three lines at the bottom of the page, below the very word 'bottom':

Master. Now get up, sir & look at the clock
And remember the time – & the rod – & the block.
You ought to remember them.

George. Some have forgot 'em
But Algernon won't: only look at his bottom!
These lines are measured out in a visual pattern, figuratively marked in red blood on the skin and literally marked in black ink on the page, to make Algernon into a body disciplined by metre. By counting the stroke of the birch on the block, like the mechanical ticking of time on the clock, Algernon's flogging is not an internalisation of rhythm into the body but an externalisation of metre written on the body, in long and short lines that look like an abstraction of classical verse. By locating this scene in an imaginary theatre with other schoolboys watching, 'The Flogging-Block' allows Algernon's Flogging' to be read as an exemplary performance of the metrical discipline associated with Eton.

The graphic inscription of Algernon's bottom as the primary site (or primal scene) for metrical instruction is a dramatic reversal of Victorian ideas about poetry learned 'by heart'. In Victorian Poetry and the Culture of the Heart, for example, Kirstie Blair argues that new theories of rhythm were emerging in mid-Victorian England, at a time when metaphors of the heart were increasingly literalised and embodied in literary and medical discourses: 'as physiologists considered the pulse in relation to measure, so both poets and poetic theorists in this period can be seen moving toward a “physiological” view of poetic metre, as opposed to classical scansion which earlier writers had attempted to impose upon English' (Blair 2006b, 71). Extending this argument into a reading of Victorian physiological poets, Jason Rudy explores in Electric Meters how pulsing rhythms were performed by Spasmodic poets such as Sydney Dobell, who imagined all rhythmic experience originating in 'the systole and diastole' of the body (Rudy 2009, 86). Sydney Dobell's Balder is perhaps most famous for its attempt to embody this idea of rhythm in language:

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(Dobell 1875, 260)

Of course the regulation of rhythm by metre in this line of verse already suggests a metrical mediation that produces the figure of rhythm, according to a logic made more explicit in 'Algernon's Flogging', in the reiteration of 'Swish! Oh!' on the page. 'The Flogging-Block' demonstrates an alternative to the expressive reading of rhythm that physiological poets tried to locate inside the body: we can read Swinburne's manuscript as a parodic invention of the Spasmodic impulse, not felt in the heart but imposed and exposed on the bottom.

Recent work in historical prosody has begun to analyse and historicise the proliferation of nineteenth-century theories of rhythm and metre, as shifting terms in a complex (and often reversible) interplay between the internalisation and externalisation of poetic form, between rhythm and metre, and the embodiment of rhythm and metrical abstraction, between the individualisation and mechanisation of metre, between individual incorporation and the abstract embodiment of metrical culture. While situating 'The Flogging-Block' within these Victorian discourses about metre, my reading 'on' the manuscript also proposes an approach to historical prosody that reflects (as Swinburne did) on the materialisation of metre on the page, here, in the traces of his handwriting, we see Swinburne's subversion, or perversion, of Victorian metrical culture.

Although Swinburne did not articulate a comprehensive theory of metre, Yisrael Levin points out that 'the metrical proficiency of his poems, as well as some of his privately offered remarks on them, shows a poet very much thinking as prosodist' (Levin 2011, 179). Proceeding (suggestively) that Swinburne was 'a closet prosodist', Levin cites a letter written by Swinburne to a classicist well-versed in classical prosody (11 October 1891). Swinburne claimed that his poetry was 'intended — as far as I remember — “to be set out” if necessary — in rigid metrical schemes', even while declaiming knowledge about 'the technical definition of metrical feet (e.g. I never could remember — if indeed I ever knew — about Paons or Pyrrhics)' (Swinburne 2004b, 3.30). But notwithstanding Swinburne's rather disingenuous disclaimer that 'Coleridge's “Lesson for a Boy” contains all I ever mastered on the subject', 'The Flogging-Block' is
a masterful performance of his own lesson for a boy, or many boys, in rigid metrical schemes. This exercise (like Swinburne's imaginative response to the photograph sent to him, of the flogging block at Eton) was a way of doing poetic justice 'to all sides of the question', reversing the sentimental prosody of the beating heart into a perverse prosody for beating the bottom, and dramatising 'dozens of different fellows diversely suffering' in the infinite variations of his verse.

To make the metrical instruction of one boy stand in for many, Algernon's name is repeated as a synonym for flogging throughout 'The Flogging-Block', as we learn in 'Charlie's Flogging' (Figure 5.9):

Flagellation and Algernon (Swish!) must appear:
    Synonymous terms to the younger boys here;
    When they hear the word flagellation, I guess,
    That word must remind them of Algernon, yes,
    And when Algernon's name is pronounced, the sensation
    It evokes must recall a good sound flagellation;
    Or rather, considering that youth's daily ration
    Of birch, a good many good sound flagellations.

Making Algernon 'synonymous' with flagellation, Swinburne turns metrical discipline into the very definition of poetry: with every boy who is beaten, another poem is being written. The seemingly endless production of poems through the reiteration of 'Swish!' (written again, and

Flagellation and Algernon (Swish!) must appear:
    Synonymous terms to the younger boys here;
    When they hear the word flagellation, I guess,
    That word must remind them of Algernon, yes,
    And when Algernon's name is pronounced, the sensation
    It evokes must recall a good sound flagellation;
    Or rather, considering that youth's daily ration
    Of birch, a good many good sound flagellations.

5.9 Detail from 'Charlie's Flogging' (Bologna V from 'The Flogging-Block')

again and again in the pages of his manuscript) gives us another perspective on T. S. Eliot's often-quoted essay, 'Swinburne as Poet': 'It is, in fact, the word that gives him the thrill, not the object. When you take to pieces any verse of Swinburne, you find that the object was not there — only the word' (Eliot 1920a, 148). Or perhaps not even the word is there, only the thrill of (Swish) in parentheses: an empty mark of metre, enumerating youth's daily rations of metrical discipline so that we may learn to read the sound of a 'good many good sound flagellations', as an effect of metre. If Swinburne was a 'closet prosodist' who transformed Victorian ideas about metre through his own poetic practice, his hyperbolic performance of metrical discipline in 'The Flogging-Block' brings him out of the closet: 'Only look at his bottom!'

NOTES

1 Eton's tribute to Swinburne is published in The Eton College Chronicle 1270 (13 May 1899): 471-2. Swinburne's 'Eton: An Ode for the Four Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Foundation of The College' first appeared in a catalogue of 'Portraits, Views, and other Objects of Interest Connectec with the History of Eton' (1891) and was printed in The Athenaeum (30 May 1891). Correspondence with Eton about Swinburne's ode is included in Swinburne 2004b, 3.24.

2 The manuscript for 'Eton: Another Ode' is at the British Library (Ashley MS 5271) and quoted in Lafourcade (Lafourcade 1992, 47). As noted by Barnett 1969 and Meyers (in Swinburne 2004b, 3.51), this unpublished ode seems to have been dedicated to Mary Gordon Leith.

3 'The Flogging-Block' is held at the British Library (Ashley MS 3926) and has not been published. I am grateful to the British Library for permission to quote and reproduce passages from this manuscript. Additional poems related to 'The Flogging-Block' are in the collection at Worcester College Library, Oxford: 'a large boxful of more than forty sheets' that include 'completed poems and dialogues which describe with obsessive repetitiveness the beating of schoolboys', as well as a draft of 'Eton: Another Ode' (Rookaby 1990, 275). Other flagellant verse by Swinburne was published anonymously in The Whippingham Papers and in The Pearl, signed 'Honoree' (see Rookaby 1997, 34).

5 On Swinburne's 'flogging muse' as 'Scholastic Dame' associated with the figure of Sappho, see Prins 1999, 152–5. My current argument about metrical discipline at Eton is a further elaboration of that discussion.

6 In 'Suffering in Style', a paper presented at the Swinburne Centenary Conference in 2009 and forthcoming in his book Exquisite Pens, Ellis Hanson suggested that the capital letter B seemed 'especially protuberant and spankable' in the grammatical reversal of Swinburne's 'But' in the middle of a stanza. On the spankability of the butt in relation to queer style, see also A Poem Is Being Written in Sedgwick 1993.

7 After leaving Eton under the shadow of pedagogical pedantry, Johnson renamed himself Cory (the Greek name for 'young boy'). In a letter to Swinburne (early November 1872), Simeon Solomon commented on the scandal: 'have you heard that Johnson has left and changed his name to Corry (sic). It is creating a sensation at Eton' (Swinburne 1959–62, 2.202). On Johnson as a teacher see Mackenzie 1950; Carter 1959; and Costigan 1972.

8 Johnson's poems were published anonymously at his own expense in Ionica (1858) and Ionica II (1877), and later collected under the name of William Johnson Cory (1891). During his years at Eton, Johnson produced books designed for exercises in classical metres, including Lucrettius: An Introduction to the Art of Writing Latin Lyric Verses (1871) and Lophon: An Introduction to the Art of Writing Greek Iambic Verses (1873). Johnson also wrote 'The Eton Boating Song', set to music by Algernon Drummond, and sung by generations of Etonians.

9 On Swinburne's relation to his cousin Mary Gordon Leith, see Fuller 1968; Wilson 1969; Birdfield 1980; Swinburne 2004b, 3.48; Maxwell 2009; and Maxwell 2010a, 121–31.

10 Composed between 1862 and 1863, A Year's Letters was published in 1877 under the pseudonym 'Krs. Horace Manns', and reissued in 1905 as Love's Cross-Currients (with some passages excised) under the name of Swinburne. Sypher's 1974 edition is based on the original manuscript.

11 On the Spasmodics, see also LaPorte and Rudy (2004) and Cronin, who quotes 'this remarkable passage from Baldor' to demonstrate how 'Spasmodic poetry aspires to a single pitch of stylistic intensity from which, inevitably, it often tumbles into bathos' (Cronin 2002, 299).

12 On historical prosody, see Prins 2000 and 2003, and more recently Martin and Levin 2011; Hall 2011a; Hall 2011b; and Martin 2012.

13 In his letter to the classical F. H. Myers, Swinburne refers to Coleridge's poem, 'Metrical Feet: Lessons for a Boy', and he goes on to mock the metrical feet of his own verse, 'with all the weight or stress thrown upon the last syllable' (Swinburne 2004b, 3.40–1).

WHAT GOES AROUND: SWINBURNE'S
A CENTURY OF ROUNDELS

Herbert F. Tucker

This chapter begins, somewhat like the form of Swinburne's devising that is its subject, at the end, which is to say at the 'Envoy' concluding A Century of Roundels (1883) on its last and hundredth page:

Fly, white butterflies, out to sea,
Fray 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.

(Swinburne 1904, 5.193)

We see from this example how a roundel is wrought: in the structural terms that distinguish this formal genre, it is a double whirling displaying geometric increase. 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, De-Fort-Du (Freud 1961, 8–9) - is resumed at wider gauge by the whole poem: aba bab aba, run the lines, recapitulating across the ensemble of
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