

A.C. Swinburne and the Singing Word: New Perspectives on the Mature Work edited by Yisrael Levin. Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010. xii, 190 pp. ISBN: 978-0-7546-6996-8. £55.00; \$99.95.

Yisrael Levin opens his introduction to *A.C. Swinburne and the Singing Word: New Perspectives on the Mature Work* by admitting that it might seem “counterintuitive, perhaps even self-defeating,” to dedicate “a collection of essays to Swinburne’s later work.” After all, for the last century it has been a critical commonplace, even among many of his defenders, that the poet produced little of lasting worth apart from *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865), *Poems and Ballads, First Series* (1866), and a handful of poems from *Poems and Ballads, Second Series* (1878) – and there have been many who have grudged him even this much credit. Levin’s collection is dedicated to the worthy task of challenging this perception by exposing readers “to Swinburne’s less familiar works” and providing “new contexts in which to read them.” As Levin remarks, Swinburne was always “a difficult poet,” but his decreased “concern for the public’s approval” or understanding, combined with his increased poetic experimentation, can make the late work seem to be forbiddingly obscure at best and musical nonsense at worst. Fortunately, Levin has gathered together essays by nine scholars capable, as David G. Riede remarks in his afterword, of making the late Swinburne “more approachable,” and conveying what the “happy few” Swinburneans have known for so long: those willing to engage with the best of “the difficult late work” will find “all-but-overwhelming sense” behind its “all-but-overwhelming sound.”

In “Knowledge and Sense Experience in Swinburne’s Late Poetry,” Stephanie Kuduk Weiner focusses on the empirical underpinnings of Swinburne’s late poetry, arguing that, from *Poems and Ballads, Second Series* forward, his verse is characterized by “a sustained exploration of the scope and limits of knowledge drawn from sense experience.” This exploration, she argues, is carried out in two types of poems considered to constitute “new directions” in his late work: “descriptive poems” focussed on “sense experience of particular places,” such as “A Midsummer Holiday” (1884) and “The Lake of Gaube” (1904), and non-referential “sound-driven poems” that treat “language as its own sensory experience,” such as “Sestina” and “A Ballad of Dreamland” (1878), and “Envoi” from *A Century of Roundels* (1883). Although her demonstration that Swinburne could indeed write referential poetry may help put to rest the critical canard that, as T.S. Eliot damningly remarked, he lived exclusively in a “world of words,” it is Weiner’s willingness to “meet this criticism” that yields the most intriguing results, as she explores the “sound-driven poems” in order to illuminate the ways in which