

Bonchurch: Home of Algernon Charles Swinburne

Swinburne grew up at East Dene, a large stone mansion and

estate in the village of Bonchurch, which his father bought as a holiday home in 1841. At the age of five, he was baptised in the old village

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Due to being a vibrant, rather rebellious character who enjoyed the excesses of life, his health suffered, and at the age of 42, Swinburne collapsed with over exertion at the age of 40.

Thereafter he was taken in by his friend Theodore Watts and became quite reclusive for the next 30 years before his death in 1909.

Unseen Poem Challenge!



In pairs or small groups, **discuss, analyse and annotate** Swinburne's poem (right), looking at **language, form, structure, tone and meaning**.

Try identifying poetic techniques such as **rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, assonance, consonance, repetition** etc.

Consider the **effects** the poet is able to create.

Task: Can you write a similar poem based on an animal you love?

Extract from 'To A Cat'

STATELY, kindly, lordly friend,
Condescend
Here to sit by me, and turn
Glorious eyes that smile and burn,
Golden eyes, love's lustrous meed,
On the golden page I read.

All your wondrous wealth of hair,
Dark and fair,
Silken-shaggy, soft and bright
As the clouds and beams of night,
Pays my reverent hand's caress
Back with friendlier gentleness.

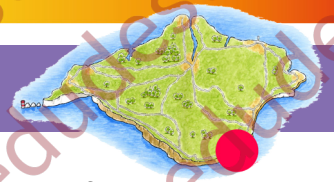
Morning round this silent sweet
Garden-seat
Sheds its wealth of gathering light,
Thrills the gradual clouds with might,
Changes woodland, orchard, heath,
Lawn, and garden there beneath.

Fair and dim they gleamed below:
Now they glow
Deep as even your sunbright eyes,
Fair as even the waking skies.
Can it not or can it be
Now that you give thanks to see ?

...
What within you wakes with day
Who can say?
All too little may we tell,
Friends who like each other well,
What might haply, if we might,
Bid us read our lives aright.

Wild on woodland ways your sires
Flashed like fires;
Fair as flame and fierce and fleet
As with wings on wingless feet
Shone and sprang your mother, free,
Bright and brave as wind or sea.

Arts, Literary & History Trail - BONCHURCH - KS4



The poet and author Thomas Hardy, a close friend of Swinburne's (who is said to have been influenced by some of his beliefs), wrote this poem 'A Singer Asleep' whilst sitting next to Swinburne's grave:

I
In this fair niche above the unslumbering sea,
That sentry's up and down all night, all day,
From cove to promontory, from ness to bay,
The Fates have fity bidden that he should be Pillowed eternally.

II
- It was as though a garland of red roses
Had fallen about the hood of some smug nun
When irresponsibly dropped as from the sun,
In fulth of numbers freaked with musical closes,
Upon Victoria's formal middle time
His leaves of rhythm and rhyme.

III
O that I could bring a flame
When, down the aisle, I saw
Passing the aisle into my heart,
I walked and read with a quick glad surprise
New words, in classic guise, -

IV
The passionate pages of his earlier years,
Fraught with hot sighs, sad laughters, kisses, tears;
Fresh-fluted notes, yet from a minstrel who
Blew them not naively, but as one who knew
Full well why thus he blew.

V
I still can hear the brabble and the roar
At those thy tunes, O still one, now passed through
That fitful fire of tongues then entered new!
Their power is spent like spindrift on this shore;
Thine swells yet more and more.

VI
- His singing-mistress verily was no other
Than she the Lesbian, she the music-mother
Of all the tribe that feel in melodies;
Who leapt, love-anguished, from the Leucadian steep
Into the rambling world-encircling deep
Which hides her where none sees.

VII
And one can hold in thought that nightly here
His phantom may draw down to the water's brim,
And hers come up to meet it, as a dim
Lone shine upon the heaving hydrosphere.

VIII
And may I wonder, they have said,
Whose very arts are love incarnadine?
And her smile back: "Disciple true and warm,
Sufficient now are thine." . . .

IX
So here, beneath the waking constellations,
Where the waves peal their everlasting strains,
And their dull subterrene reverberations
Shake him when storms make mountains of their plains -
Him once their peer in sad improvisations,
And deft as wind to cleave their frothy manes -
I leave him, while the daylight gleam declines
Upon the capes and chines.

BONCHURCH, 1910

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Literature Activity

- ▶ Hardy's poem reflects on the many things he loved about his friend. Whilst visiting St Boniface Church, find a quiet spot (perhaps by Swinburne's grave) and reflect on the qualities of one of your close friends.
- ▶ You could think about their likes, dislikes, influences, traits, characteristics and generally what you like about them. Use the poem 'A Singer Asleep' to inspire a piece of poetry about one of your closest friends.
- ▶ You could write your first draft in Bonchurch, then amend it later.
- ▶ In order to challenge yourself, you could try to use a similar rhyme scheme to Hardy - you will have to study the form of the poem closely in order to achieve this.





2. Take a walk around Bonchurch village. Find Swinburne's grave. Write notes for a descriptive piece of writing or make a sketch which evokes the character of a chosen place. You could focus on the sadness of his death, or the celebration of his life.



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3. Imagine you have to write some promotional material for Bonchurch and the surrounding area to attract tourists. Look for examples in the place you are staying to see how it is done.

What are the key things that would appeal to visitors? List some ideas below to help with completion of advertising materials back at school.

- ✓
- ✓
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