

**ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE:**

**THE CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF HIS SAPPHIC POSSESSION**

**By**

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis regards the extraordinary power of Sappho in the 1860s as resulting in a form of “Sapphic Possession” which laid hold on Swinburne, shaped his verse, produced a provocative new poetics, and which accounted for a critical reception of his work that was both hostile and enthralled.

Using biographical material and Freudian psychology, I show how Swinburne became attracted to Sappho and came to rely on her as a substitute mistress and particular kind of muse, and I demonstrate the pre-eminence of the Sapphic presence in Poems and Ballads: 1, as a dominant female muse who exacts peculiar sacrifices from the poet of subjection, necrophilia, and even a form of “death” in the loss of his own personality; as a result, he is finally reduced to acting as the muse’s mouthpiece, a state akin to that of Pythia or Sibyl. Verse written under such duress instigates a new poetics where the demands and constructs of the muse produce a sublime composed of aberrance, fracture and the darkness of myth.

To explicate this argument I read Poems and Ballads: 1 through carnival, a form of Bacchanal or Sapphic Komos which has the effect of blurring the boundaries between life and lyric, and which demands a joyous and reciprocal response from its readers, in which they must acknowledge their own attraction to the Sapphic sublime.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this to the memory of my father, Roy Whyte Purnell who first introduced me to the verse of Algernon Charles Swinburne some sixty years ago.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Marion Thain for her unfailing support, wise guidance and good humour. I would also like to thank my children, who, in their various ways, have given me invaluable assistance: Victoria and Sophia have contributed their typing skills; Harry has given advice on Classical matters, while Fred has shared his thoughts on carnival and Ted has assisted with IT. I would also like to thank Roger Ingham who has tirelessly transported me to and from Birmingham University. Lastly I would like to acknowledge funding from the University of Staffordshire.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ACS: Gosse, E. The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne. London: Macmillan, 1917.
- CW: The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne. Eds. Edmund Gosse and Thomas James Wise
- Gordon: Disney-Leith, Mary. Boyhood of Algernon Charles Swinburne. London: Chatto and Wyndus, 1917.
- Lang: The Swinburne Letters. 6 vols. Ed. Cecil Y. Lang. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Yale UP, 1959-1962.
- L J: Lafourcade, Georges. La Jeunesse de Swinburne 1837-1867. 2 vols. Paris: OUP, 1928.
- Notes: "Notes on Poems and Reviews." In Swinburne Replies. Ed. Clyde K. Hyder. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1966, 16-32.
- P&S: Gosse, E. Portraits and Sketches. London: Heineman, 1912.
- SAC: Swinburne as Critic. Ed. Clyde K. Hyder. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972.
- SR: Swinburne Replies. Ed. Clyde K. Hyder. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1966, 16-32.
- SSS: Maxwell, Catherine. "Swinburne: Style, Sympathy and Sadomasochism." Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies, 12 (Fall 2003), 86-96.
- TCH: Swinburne: The Critical Heritage. Ed. Clyde K. Hyder. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970.
- TFS: Maxwell, Catherine. The Female Sublime from Milton to Swinburne: Bearing Blindness. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2001
- TSC: Reynolds, Margaret. The Sappho Companion. London: Vintage, 2001.
- TSH: Reynolds, Margaret. The Sappho History. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- UL: The Uncollected letters of Algernon Charles Swinburne. Ed. Terry L. Meyers. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005.



## INTRODUCTION

“Someone, I say, will remember us in the future.”

“By the hunger of change and emotion,  
By the thirst of unbearable things...”

Swinburne’s fortunes in the twentieth century were certainly varied, owing as much to “the hunger of change and emotion” as to the “thirst of unbearable things.”<sup>1</sup> In the early part of the century he was biographically bowdlerised by his cousin Mary Disney-Leith, distorted by Edmund Gosse, scavenged by Theodore Watts-Dunton, and forged by Thomas Wise; and later he was to be damned by T.S. Eliot in his essay “Swinburne as Poet” (1920).<sup>2</sup> However, his more “respectable” verses remained firmly embedded in anthologies, and biographies and critical works abounded, most notable among which was the massive two volume work by Georges Lafourcade, La Jeunesse de Swinburne (1928), which still remains the most comprehensive study of Swinburne and his early work. A glance at Frederick Faverty’s section on Swinburne in The Victorian Poets (1969) will show a huge assortment of extraordinarily disparate work that continued to be written about the poet in the first half of the Twentieth Century. However, it was with the publication of Cecil. Y. Lang’s The Swinburne Letters in 1959, along with renewed interest in the PreRaphaelites, that significant scholarly interest began to take place in journals such as the Journal of Pre- Raphaelite Studies, The Victorian Newsletter, Victorian Studies and Victorian Poetry, this last devoting the greater part of the 1971 Fall edition to Swinburne. Indeed, I have found a number of articles from this edition particularly stimulating, in particular, those by Julian Baird, Robert Greenberg and F.A.C. Wilson. Following from this initiative, the seventies saw important contributions made to Swinburne scholarship by a raft of scholars, some

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<sup>1</sup> The first quotation is from Sappho’s fragment 147 and the second from Swinburne’s “Dolores”.

<sup>2</sup> Actually Eliot’s remarks were misunderstood: his much-quoted: “the meaning is only the hallucination of meaning” (149), was taken out of context, he had continued: “The world of Swinburne does not depend on some other world which it stimulates; it has the necessary completeness and self-sufficiency for justification and permanence.” However, this served to reinforce earlier criticism. Harold Nicolson, for example, would comment in 1926: “There are many who agree with [George] Meredith in thinking him ‘devoid of an internal centre....’”(2).

of whom are now usefully discussed by Rikky Rooksby in The Whole Music of Passion (12-14). They are so very numerous it would seem invidious to pinpoint individuals, but I personally have found the work of Ian Fletcher in Swinburne and Jerome K. McGann in Experiment in Criticism particularly interesting, although I do not necessarily accept their arguments. I have also found two books by Clyde K. Hyder: Swinburne Replies (1966) and Swinburne: The Critical Heritage (1972) extremely useful in providing a helpful point of reference to contemporary Victorian reception.<sup>3</sup> However, this is a mere sketch of books about the poet, available in the earlier part of the twentieth century, as K.H. Beetz's A.C. Swinburne: A Bibliography of Secondary Works (1980) will show.

The late sixties and seventies saw a resurgence in biography: two rather sensational biographies, one by Jean Overton Fuller (1968) and the other by Donald Thomas (1979), and a third, a very thorough one by Philip Henderson, Swinburne the Portrait of a Poet, (1974) with thoughtful verse criticism, which I have found very useful to refer to. More recently in the field of biography, knowledge of Swinburne's life has been augmented by Rikki Rooksby's meticulous Swinburne: A Poet's Life (1997), and Terry Meyers The Uncollected Letters of Algernon Charles Swinburne (2007) has added further to the earlier collection by Lang; the recently-published sixth volume of Pickering and Chatto's facsimile edition of Lives of Victorian Literary Figures (2005) complements the picture with its useful section on Swinburne as seen through the eyes of his contemporaries. Further details of these and other publications mentioned in this chapter will be found in my bibliography.

In the late twentieth century and more particularly in the twenty-first, interest in Swinburne has accelerated, not only through the initiative of scholars mentioned above, but there have been important new contributions to Swinburne studies by such diverse scholars as Yisrael Levin, Margot Louis, Terry Meyers, Elizabeth Prettejohn and Nicholas Shrimpton, and others too numerous to mention here. Catherine Maxwell provides a useful selection of the more recent contributors in Swinburne (2006) (138-141), and others will be found in my bibliography. I shall

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<sup>3</sup> Mention must also be made of two oddities: John S. Mayfield's 1974 "gallimaufry of bits and pieces" about Swinburne, and Randolph Hughes' 1952 edition of Lesbia Brandon, remarkable for its vituperative footnotes.

refer more specifically to the important work of Catherine Maxwell along with that of Yopie Prins, Thäis Morgan and other scholars concerned with gender, in the section below, all of whose work I have made copious use in the course of writing this thesis.

The strength and extent of contemporary Swinburne scholarship was made apparent at the recent Swinburne Centenary Conference which took place on 10<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> July 2009, and during the course of which thirty-nine scholarly papers covering a huge spectrum of interest, were given. Even as I write, a new work is in preparation edited by Yisrael Levin: A.C. Swinburne and The Singing Word: New Perspectives on the Mature Work.

In recent years, running almost parallel with the development of interest in Swinburne, has been interest in Sappho and Sapphism. As in the case of Swinburne, Sappho's early twentieth century fortunes had been mixed: discoveries of new Sappho fragments at Oxyrhynchus by Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt in 1895, had given emphasis to her predictions of more than two and a half millennia earlier: "Someone, I say, will remember us in the future", since in the early part of the twentieth century, there was a renewal of interest in her work and in her legend, which in turn, provided inspiration for new editions of the fragments as well as inspiration for poetry and fiction.<sup>4</sup> She was also to become an early icon of lesbianism, and later utilised by writers such as H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) and Virginia Woolf.

In the latter part of the century she was, rather like Swinburne and roughly at the same time, (after the publication of Lang's collected letters in 1959), brought further into the scholarly consciousness, by the canonical edition of Denys Page, Sappho and Alcaeus (1955). In 1971 The Penguin Book of Greek Verse was published, and in 1982 a new Loeb Edition Greek Lyric appeared, and the floodgates of Sappho scholarship were opened, and have remained open in the twenty-first century: for example, there has been textual work such as that by Richard Jenkyns, detailed history of the legend and its reception in the Ancient World by

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<sup>4</sup> Margaret Reynolds provides an explicit overview of such work in Chapters 10-14 of TSC (255-370) and in Chapters 8-9 of TSH (206-237).

Dimitrios Yatromanolakis, and her history has been traced up to the present time by numerous scholars including Germaine Greer, Peter Tomory, Margaret Williamson, and there are two remarkable volumes by Margaret Reynolds, (all of whose details will be found in my bibliography). There have also been fresh verse translations by Josephine Balmer, Stanley Lombardo, Anne Carson and David Constantine, and a recently-discovered fragment identified in 2004 by Michael Gronewald and Robert Daniel was translated by Martin West in 2005. At the same time, Sappho has continued to provide inspiration for various works of lesbian fiction.<sup>5</sup> Like Swinburne, Sappho has led a double life, serving both as a respectable anthologised poet and a signifier of aberrant sexual practice.

It is perhaps no coincidence that after the publication of Michel Foucault's The History of Sexuality (1980), both Swinburne and Sappho ceased being split personalities, i.e. either poets or sexual deviants, and became instead, considered as homogenous wholes: Swinburne-the Poet, became associated with sexuality and masculinity in Victorian Gender Studies by such scholars as Richard Dellamora, Linda Dowling, Thaïs Morgan and Herbert Sussman; while Sappho, both Poet and Legend, became an icon of feminist thinking and a necessary part of any study on Gender, as widely diverse work by such scholars as Jean DeJean, Page du Bois, Ellen Greene, Germaine Greer, Susan Gubar, Lyn Hatherly Wilson, Camille Paglia and Ruth Vanita, (to mention only a few), have shown.

However, it was not simply the case of two interesting literary figures who were also associated with issues of gender, running in parallel lanes; as we approached the end of the twentieth century, scholars began to associate the two together; this in itself was nothing new: because of his three specifically Sapphic poems in Poems and Ballads: 1 and his later "On the Cliffs" (1881), Swinburne's Sapphism had long been acknowledged, sometimes in a derogatory fashion, as by Harold Nicolson, who stated in his 1926 biography Swinburne, that he felt "a sense almost of irritation that so much fine writing should have been expended on Sappho"

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of this with examples see Reynolds (TSH 337-391). For a review of this book and of Erica Jong's 1993 novel Sappho's Leap, see Emily Williamson's article: "Tongue Breaks" London Review of Books (8.1. 2004).

(167). Lafourcade, however was more perspicacious: “He (Swinburne) found in the Sapphic fragments and tradition a kind of burning unsatisfied inspiration, which he felt as strongly akin to his own” (Swinburne’s ‘Hyperion’ and Other Poems 149). In the second half of the twentieth century, scholars such as David Cook, Robert Greenberg and Jerome McGann, had begun to give the connection more thoughtful consideration and initiated a change of approach.<sup>6</sup> By the twenty-first century there seemed to be a distinct Sapphic presence hovering about Swinburne: important scholars such as Catherine Maxwell, Thäis Morgan, Camille Paglia, Yopie Prins, Kathy Psomiades, and Joyce Zonana, began to associate the two together; nor was it now a question of Swinburne’s mastery of and over Sappho, rather the reverse: for instance, in her important book Victorian Sappho, Prins devotes a whole chapter to “Swinburne’s Sapphic Sublime”, and asks: “Why is Algernon Charles Swinburne remembered as the most Sapphic of Victorian poets, if not indeed, *the very reincarnation of Sappho?*” (112; my emphasis); and in her influential book The Female Sublime from Milton To Swinburne: Bearing Blindness, Maxwell claims, “Swinburne’s respectful submission to Sappho’s mould . . . is more of a ritual submission, like a form of possession in which he believes himself consumed by her”(40).

This new emphasis on the relationship between Swinburne and Sappho in which Swinburne is, as it were, the creature of Sappho (rather than vice versa), seemed to me one that needed to be taken a great deal further, and the more I studied his early verse, and life (up to the time of the publication of Poems and Ballads:1 in 1866), the more I saw Sappho repeatedly exerting power over Swinburne, affecting him not only as a poet, but also as a man; and it seemed to me that this force coming at him doubly, as it were, was so great that he became subject not just to something like “a form of possession”, but was, in fact, to become wholly overwhelmed by the Sapphic presence. I briefly outline my reasons for this conviction.

As I researched into Sappho, I saw a number of recurrent constructs associated with her: the Sublime, Sexuality, Aberrance, Fracture, Lability and the Greek, and it became borne in on me

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<sup>6</sup> All three were writing in the seventies. McGann discusses Swinburne and Sappho in Swinburne: An Experiment in Criticism (107 -116). Cook’s article is entitled “The Content and Meaning of Swinburne’s ‘Anactoria’”; Greenberg’ article, “Erotion, Anactoria and the Sapphic Passion.” Both appeared in issues of Victorian Poetry. Details of these and other relevant authors will be found in my bibliography.

how extraordinarily closely these constructs chimed with Swinburne's own interests, obsessions and anxieties, and it seemed to me that the Sapphic presence or muse as I began to regard her, greatly resembled Swinburne's personal icon, the fatal woman. I saw him drawn to her in three particular ways: a sense of kinship, an attraction to her glittering otherness, and finally as a refuge from the outside world in the form of an alternative sexualised mistress and muse. It was these three factors that I saw underlying a process of Sapphic possession, and I came to believe it was this process that formed the poet and caused him to cast his "spirit into the mould of hers" (Notes 21), and I became convinced that it was under this influence, that Swinburne was enabled to compose Poems and Ballads: 1.

It seemed to me that to trace this process and to show how Swinburne came to be possessed by Sappho, would be a fascinating exercise in itself, and might explain how it was that Swinburne, an immature man with deficient sexuality, was inspired and enabled to write such powerfully erotic verse. I adopted a two-pronged approach: firstly, I searched out obvious, and less obvious "encounters" between Swinburne and Sappho in the narrative of his life, secondly, I showed how these encounters and Swinburne's anxieties and obsessions were reflected in Poems and Ballads: 1. Secondly, developing ideas from the work by Ekbert Faas and Russell Goldfarb, I used Freudian psychology to read Sappho as associated with libido emanating from Swinburne's id, and becoming defined in the form of a dominatrical muse, exerting her possessive powers over Poems and Ballads: 1, as she had over his life.<sup>7</sup>

This in itself *was* a fascinating study, but this was only the first of my aims; the second was to show how radically an appreciation of this process of Sapphic possession would enhance our understanding of the underlying poetics. Most obviously, Swinburne could not be accused of a

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<sup>7</sup> After 1866 the Sapphic influence would recede. When he visited Swinburne in his old age, Paul Reuil asked Swinburne a pertinent question: "Nous demandons au poète, pourquoi les premiers Poèmes et Ballades, qui firent tant de bruit, restent uniques en son oeuvre et n'eurent pas de recommencement. Après un moment de réflexion, il répond simplement: "Parce que l'impulsion cessa..." (L'homme et l'oeuvre 125). ("We asked the poet why the first Poems and Ballads which caused such a sensation remained alone in his work and hadn't been renewed. After a moment's reflection he replied: "because the source of inspiration ceased"). The answer is revealing: under the strict guardianship of Theodore Watts Dunton there was no room for Sappho at "The Pines". Swinburne's libido was suppressed, and the desire to express it in verse weakened. However, perhaps we can see some Sapphic rekindling in some of the more inspired later work, "The Lake of Gaube" (1899), for instance.

lack “of an internal centre” (see footnote 2), if Sappho *was* that centre; but what would it mean to read the volume as a document of Sapphic possession? It is to unravel the significance of that reading, which forms the purpose of the second part of the thesis.

What is the significance of Sapphic possession for Poems and Ballads: 1? If the volume was written “in obedience” to Sappho, what sort of position would it occupy in contemporary poetics, what would it say about the nature of the poet, the quality of his verse, and the demands made on its readers? What would be the effect of reading Poems and Ballads: 1 in terms of performance by and of, the Sapphic muse? What position would the poet now hold, who spoke not for himself, but as a Sapphic mouthpiece? What sort of muse exactly was Sappho, and how would she affect the nature of the verse produced? What would be the implications for verse dominated by her alternative Greekness and dominating femininity? How would her own brand of sublimity composed of sexuality, fracture, aberrance, and even the putrid, present itself, and how would this be received in the context of contemporary 19<sup>th</sup> century poetics? <sup>8</sup>

And there is a further consideration: one of Sappho’s many constructs is lability, and in my study of Sappho, and particularly of her role in the nineteenth century, I had been struck by the fact that the impact of her constructs was not confined to Swinburne, but that many of her associations were also avidly regarded by his contemporaries and spoke of their anxieties, as they had of his. We can then begin to understand why this Sapphic document of Poems and Ballads: 1 caused the shock that it did, since the Sapphic presence moving adroitly from lyric to life created a space where private anxiety and obsession became open to public view, and more than that, demanded its celebration.

Swinburne’s own reception of Sappho was much bound up with her Greekness, and his translation of this construct constituted an important aspect of her dynamic impact on his nineteenth century audience, and I too, have taken advantage of her Greekness and Classical

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<sup>8</sup> I do not attempt to list here all the references to contemporary critical reception that I shall refer to later, although I might pinpoint Robert Buchanan, John Morley and Alfred Austin. These and secondary works of reference are listed in my bibliography.

pedigree as a way of approaching Poems and Ballads: 1 from a new perspective. I have used the analogy of the Pythia or Sibyl to explicate Swinburne's role as a poet, and the trope of the maenad to forge a link between Sappho and Swinburne's libido. Finally, I conclude the thesis by extending the Bakhtian carnivalesque to reading the volume as "Sapphic Bacchanal" or "Komos", a triumphant celebration of Swinburne's Sapphic possession, the emergence of the libido in the form of the muse, and its triumphant orgasmic expression in the search for an alternative sublime. I utilise this trope of Sapphic Komos to illustrate three further demands made on the readers of Poems and Ballads: 1 by the Sapphic presence: the insistence on the celebration of an aberrant sublime; a demand for a reciprocal involvement; the creation of a topos where life and lyric become interchangeable.

In writing this thesis I have endeavoured to yoke together Swinburne's "thirst of unbearable things" with Sappho's insistence on recognition: "Someone, I say, will remember us in the future", and I have used this complicated and fascinating conjuncture to explore the possibilities offered by Swinburne's Sapphic Possession, and finally explicated in Sapphic Komos.



## CHAPTER 1

### “WHO IS SAPPHO? WHAT IS SHE?” IDENTIFYING SAPPHO IN 1860

Like Sylvia in the nineteenth century drawing room song, Sappho posited all sorts of questions of identity.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I propose to try and build up a picture of what the word “Sappho” might mean to an educated audience in the 1860s, to demonstrate the extraordinarily wide range of constructs the name offered, and to show how the development of persistent recurring, overlapping and sometimes contradictory associations made their presence felt in the nineteenth century.

An accurate picture, (or as accurate a picture as it is possible to draw) established in this chapter, will provide the necessary starting point from which I can, in the following chapters, appropriately relate Sappho and her constructs to Swinburne, and it will enable me to show how and why she gained possession over him. I shall also be in a position to show how, to a lesser degree, the idea of Sappho possessed the public imagination, and thus, why it was that the presence of Sappho in Poems and Ballads: 1 was so recognizable, and had the power to authorize a provocative new poetics.

In my introduction I indicated the huge amount of Sappho scholarship that has occurred since the 1860s. Surely such a volume of work presenting such a wide range of Sapphic constructs must occlude our picture of the mid nineteenth-century Sappho and make it difficult to see her as she was received then? However, I believe that our present perceptions of Sappho may help rather than hinder: in fact, the discoveries at Oxyrhynchus in 1895 reinforced and echoed familiar tropes.<sup>2</sup> And while recent scholarship is valuable in making us think about Sappho in what we imagine to be different ways, it may well be that ideas discussed in modern Sappho Studies were also present in the nineteenth century, if only subliminally, and indeed, in the

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<sup>1</sup> The text of the song comes from Act 4:2 of The Two Gentlemen of Verona. It had been set to music for voice and piano by Schubert in 1826, entitled Was ist Sylvia?

<sup>2</sup> The newly-discovered fragment translated by Martin West again reveals the Sapphic tropes of reference to the muses and the lyre, the motif of heartache, and the juxtaposition of antitheses.

following chapters I shall argue that Swinburne's reading of Sappho was in some ways more akin to that explicated by modern scholarship, than that received or acknowledged by his contemporaries. There is, moreover, one extremely significant way in which Sappho remains unchanged, not only from the nineteenth century but from Antiquity, as Reynolds comments: "Because both Sappho's work and Sappho's person are 'in pieces' it means that it and she are neither whole, nor wholly independent. So it – and she – can be possessed, taken, raped, riddled, rapt, wrapped, ventriloquised, impersonated, forged" (TSH 17).

For us, as for the Nineteenth-Century readers, this lability is a significant construct, and we have come to see Sappho as a swirling mass of fractured and fracturing Sapphos. We may think we see a bigger swirl now, but our own ideas about Sappho may well be more limited than those in the nineteenth, since we tend to view her purely as a Lesbian icon, whereas for the nineteenth century and the centuries that preceded it, she was equally a signifier of the heterosexual. The fact is, that no one since 6<sup>th</sup> B. C (if indeed then), has been able to identify a single Sappho, but this does not matter; as Maurice Bowra says: "...to appreciate her we need neither historical sense nor full knowledge of her circumstances....She stands in her own right as the most gifted woman who has ever written poetry" (247). However, she isn't simply a poet, she is also a legend, and it is clearly not good enough to dismiss all these Sapphos as simply labile and amorphous versions of a great poet; there are recurring and persistent constructs which derive from both the verse and the legend, and my remit is to see what these were in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and to try and gauge how Sappho was received *then*. As a result of these complexities we might look on Sappho as a sort of rich broth simmering and constantly being added to, and spooned out into individual bowls to suit personal taste. My aim in this chapter is, as it were, to identify the different ingredients, and to see how they flavoured each other, and to discover the different resultant, very individual broths that were simmering in the nineteenth century literary kitchens.

The difficulties of tracking down and identifying Sappho and her constructs, are enormous. In undertaking this review I see three main areas of difficulty: in the first place, the sheer volume of Sapphic material that had evolved by the 19<sup>th</sup> century makes it difficult to quantify; secondly, the amorphous nature of Sapphic material caused by the constant elision and conflation of

different constructs, the *lability* mentioned earlier, makes it hard to identify and evaluate, particularly as contradictory constructs often appear alongside each other, and thirdly, to gauge the effect on a mind-set different to my own in the twenty-first century must undoubtedly present its own problems. However, in the course of researching into Sappho, I became increasingly aware of the *same* constructs constantly appearing, reappearing, merging and conflating with each other, and it seemed to me that by identifying and tracing the evolution of dominant recurring constructs, I might be able to build up a picture of what Sappho meant to the educated mid-Victorian reader. It would be an impossible task to try and track down all Sapphic literature prior to 1860, and equally impossible to pin down all the texts and visual images that were familiar to mid-Victorian readers; I shall instead, make what I hope, is a comprehensive selection of representations of Sappho that had precursed and shaped constructs prior to 1860, and which were accessible, and being further developed at that time.

In order to address the difficulties mentioned above, I have developed a somewhat artificial process of separating and categorising different constructs of Sappho; I say “artificial”, because the overlapping of constructs means that any one construct may be represented equally well in another category, but I hope that by first teasing out and explicating simpler constructs, the more complex ones may be more readily understood. As Sappho was accessed through text and visual image, for the sake of clarity, I shall make a further artificial division between the two genres, and consider them in two separate categories: “Text” and “Visual Image”. The discussion of text will involve further artificial categorization and I subdivide it into a) Primary texts, translations and reworkings, and b) Sappho-associated Text, a section which will again be further subdivided in order to examine specific constructs. The final section: “Visual Image” will be a short one, since my aim is to show how images that were familiar to the Victorians, served to reinforce those found in text.

### **Sapphic Texts: a) primary, translations and re-workings**

While we in the twenty-first century regard it as important to establish how primary text has become available to us, interest in the provenance of Sapphic source material was not really of

general interest to the Victorian reader until after 1895 with the discoveries of Hunt and Grenfell at Oxyrhynchus, usefully discussed by Williamson (35-36). Prior to this, interest focused on the text itself, with a particular awareness of its fragmentary nature since it was known to be drawn from shards, papyri, and scattered references by scholiasts, now succinctly given in the Loeb Edition edited by David Campbell. Such scattered fragments required anthologizing, and by the mid-nineteenth century there was no shortage of published primary texts available to the educated reader. Obviously, it is important to establish what form these texts took, and I must look not simply at available contemporary Victorian texts, but also to familiar earlier influential texts, which brought with them their own history of scholarship and gloss.

The erudite reader would have been aware of the work of German scholars and particularly the 1854 edition of Theodore Bergk. There were numerous French editions which are now comprehensively described by David Robinson (160-185). The best known scholarly edition was by Jean-Francois Boissonade: Lyrici Graeci (1825), and this was familiar to Tennyson. The standard English edition was that edited by John Herman Merivale. Most Victorians, however, would have looked at more accessible texts available in English anthologized editions, particularly those accompanied by translations: there were the familiar anthologies compiled in the eighteenth century such as the editions by Edward Burnaby Greene and Edward Du Bois, and numerous nineteenth-century anthologized editions, for example, those compiled by Charles Abraham Elton and Francis Henry Egerton. (These and others are listed in my bibliography). In 1885 Henry Thorton Wharton published Sappho, Memoir, Text, Selected Renderings and a Literal Translation. Although this publication postdates Poems and Ballads: 1 by some twenty years, the discoveries of new fragments at Oxyrhynchus had not yet occurred, and so the content of the book can serve as a useful guide for us now as to exactly which fragments were accessible to the mid-Victorian reader; the bibliography too, offers a useful point of reference to other standard works (145-60).

What constructs of Sappho would this plethora of primary texts have offered to the nineteenth-century reader? Familiarity with Sappho began early with the standard school text Poetae Graeci (Part 2), from which the constructs of lyrical virtuosity and metrical effect were taught; but the

more thoughtful students would have been struck by other aspects: that the verses were broken fragments scavenged from History and, unusually in their experience of the Classics, emanated from a feminine source; that its content was undoubtedly erotic and even implied aberrant sexuality. The intelligent boy would have been struck not only by the predominant presence of eros, but by associated often antithetical tropes such as presence/absence; remembering/forgetting; giving/withholding; life/ death; day/night; pleasure/pain. Such tropes, apart from creating their own striking, often erotic effects, produced constructs of Sapphic verse in terms of fracture and lability. And such constructs acquired at an early age, would have stuck in the mind as necessary components of the poet. However, it was not possible for the nineteenth-century reader, not even the schoolboy, to study text in isolation, since the question, "Please Sir, who was this lady?" would have opened up can after can of worms. Sappho came with baggage, she came inextricably bound up with the work of subsequent authors and with secondary text, and it was the mêlée of these different aspects that spelt Sappho.

From its first introduction into France, and then into England in the seventeenth century, primary text had not come in isolation, it had come in editions with two important accompaniments: translation, and gloss. The earliest French translations, came in the wake of Boileau's translation of Longinus' De Sublimitate or Peri Hupsous which included Sappho Fragments 1 and 31, and although there had been an earlier translation by John Hall in 1652, it was the translation into English of Boileau's work in 1736 that initiated interest in Sappho in this country. Other translations followed: a Latin translation by John Hudson (1710) and William Smith's English translation (1739). A full account of these early translations is given by Germaine Greer in Slipshod Sibyls: Recognition, Rejection and The Woman Poet (131-132).

Although these early texts themselves might not have been of interest to the Victorian reader, the content would have been familiar to the more educated, and most importantly, they initiated significant constructs of Sappho that would persistently cling to her and multiply; and later they became merged into other associated texts, so that by the nineteenth century they became inseparable from her. These constructs not only belonged to Sappho's association with the sublime (which I discuss later), but gave her a particular lability as signifier of various forms of

the muse, of sexuality, aberrance, fracture and Greekness. I now look at the development of these constructs and I start with constructs of sexuality and aberrance.

Boileau's work had re-ignited the interest in two particular Sapphic fragments, 1 and 31; the latter had been famously first translated by Catullus: "Ille mi par esse deo videtur" (51) and represented an early attempt by a male poet to superimpose his voice on the lesbian voice of Sappho; it effected a confusing crossing of gender, as Lawrence Lipking puts it: "Catullus 31 represents a fall for Sappho – a fall into a masculine world" (64 -66). Joan DeJean has shown the ambivalence of early French writers responding to Sappho's sexuality revealed in this fragment (31-42). In England there was a similar variety of response by (mainly) male poets who reinforced the gender confusion or conflation inevitably caused by translating and reworking the unmentionable trope of lesbian love: a translation by Philip Sidney (1578) ignored the difficulty by omitting the early part of the poem which reveals that the object of Sappho's affection is a woman, while John Hall in his 1652 version "He That Sit Next To Thee", altered the pronoun of the beloved: "...how did *his* pleasing glances dart / Sweet languors to my ravished heart"; Ambrose Philips' 1711 version, on the other hand, gives a literal translation (TSC 39-40). Whether admitting or denying Sappho's lesbianism, textual engineering inevitably drew attention to Sappho's verse in the context of her sexuality, and this association would continue to develop.

Such widely veering takes on Sappho's sexuality were also responsible for embracing and developing two other significant constructs: lability and fracture, since the translation (in whatever sense) of Sapphic verse by a male poet, must necessarily posit questions not only about gender, but its malleability. But Sapphic lability was not restricted to sexual transformations by different poets (female and male); the very character and style of various poets as they adapted the verse in their idiosyncratic ways, presented a metamorphosing Sappho. For example, early translations utilise Sappho as a vehicle for a particular style which itself changed the poem's tone: as Lipking points out, the anacreonic metre in Philip Sidney's translation of Fragment 31 stresses the monotony of the experience, reducing "the ode to a medical report" (73). Prins illustrates the variety of different effects created by the very different

translations of Fragment 31 by John Hall (1652), Ambrose Philips (1711) and later by Hewitt (1845), showing how Hall reflects the idea of lyric as gendered, Philips (along with Addison) stressing “literalising disfigurement”, while in the nineteenth century Hewitt’s concern would be for “the suffering body” (“Sappho’s Afterlife in Translation”: Greene Re-Reading Sappho 55-67). In the eighteenth and nineteenth century the trope of sexual lability was furthered by translations that might be better described as echoings. In her chapter “Tennyson’s Sublime: From Sappho to Satan” (88-131), Maxwell shows how in their different ways, Mary Robinson in her sonnet sequence “Sappho to Phaon” (1796), Shelley in “To Constantia Singing” (1822), and Tennyson later in “Eleänore” and “Fatima” (both 1832) not only translate Fragment 31, but also echo each other. Sappho’s sexuality and lability were becoming complex and interlinked.

However, this effect was not confined to Fragment 31; by the nineteenth century, a large number of translations of other fragments had become available, all of which contributed to a general idea of Sapphic metamorphosis and lability. Reynolds cites a useful selection of different renderings which show a wide range of different emphases (TSC 29-66). For example, Landor’s selection of Fragment 102 for translation: “Mother, I cannot mind my wheel”, presents Sappho as a lovesick virgin, while Merivale’s translation of Fragment 132 (1833) shows Sappho as a mother figure (TSC 62). Translations moved further from the originals and utilised artistic license to make untrue assertions: in Anne Finch’s “Melinda, on an Insipid Beauty” (1713) Sappho’s identity was conflated with that of her eighteenth century author, while D.K. Sandford’s “The loves of Sappho and Alcaeus” (1832) perpetuated a fallacious idea that the two poets were contemporaries. Translation and reworking not only suggested Sappho’s lability, but also served to highlight her construct of fracture since scholarship and translation served to further dismember the poet and her already fractured verse. We shall see other instances of Sapphic fracture later in the chapter.

Of course, not all the texts I have mentioned would have been known to nineteenth-century readers, indeed they may have been familiar with only a few, although Swinburne’s wide-ranging reading would have made him more aware than most; but the constant repetition of these constructs would, I argue, have left a patina of Lability, Fracture and Sexuality, visible

whenever Sappho was encountered; this patina was not confined to the actual verse, but increasingly would attach itself to texts associated with Sappho.

## **b) Sappho-associated texts**

Sappho-associated texts are more complex than translations and reworkings, and they distance themselves further from the “original” Sappho for a number of reasons. Firstly, constructs may, or may not, derive from and conflate with Primary text, but they draw copiously from the legend of Sappho as well as, or instead of, the verse; it is not now just the verse which is seen as a commodity to be deconstructed, but Sappho herself. Different components associated with Sappho are extracted and are used singly or as assemblages, with the express purpose of creating a new idea which might have no actual linkage with the “original” Sappho. In order to understand how complex this interplay of forces had become by the nineteenth century, we need to look at earlier “biographical” reference to Sappho-the-Legend.

The Testimonia, a gathering together of ancient source material from scholarly reference, offered a plethora of material that served to contribute to Sapphic Legend. However, for the readers from the seventeenth century onwards, such references were largely gleaned second hand from the gloss and scholarship of earlier texts.<sup>3</sup> Sappho was seen in a family context, as wife, mother and sister, and she was romantically, but erroneously associated with other male poets, namely, Anacreon, Archilochus and Hipponax, (none of whom had, in fact, been Sappho’s contemporaries or lived in Lesbos). At some time during the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the legend of Phaon became connected to Sappho, and had its outcome in the story of her suicidal leap from the Leucadian cliff. On the other hand, her homosexuality was acknowledged and there was also an emphasis on her masculinity. By the third century A.D. a legend grew up that there were in fact two Sapphos, one a courtesan and the other a renowned poetess. She was revered as a teacher of lyric, but also viewed in a lighter vein as a teacher in the arts of love; she was

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<sup>3</sup> Campbell usefully references such material under the headings: “Biographies”; “The Other Sappho”; “Chronology”; “Birthplace”; “Family”; “Life”; “Portraits” “Comedies”; “Epitaphs”; “Ancient Editions”; “Metres”; “Ancient Commentators”; “The Verdict of Antiquity” (ix-xiii and 2-51).



associated with the nightingale, both through her appearance and her lyrical mastery, and by the second century A.D. she had come to be regarded in the light of tenth muse. She was associated with lyric performance at religious festivals and in the training of girls' choruses (partheneia). In the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. her lyrics were performed at symposia (male drinking parties), and her association of performance became further debased as she became the subject of at least six bawdy Attic comedies.

It can be seen what a multiplicity of Sapphic constructs the Testimonia provided, and how they criss-cross with constructs contained in her verse, further illustrating her lability, her signification of different sorts of often aberrant sexuality, her fracture, her status as muse, and her performability. No wonder Greene, the editor of the 1715 Works of Anacreon and Sappho commented: "This admired lady who has so long enjoyed the glorious title of tenth Muse, has yet the common misfortune of suffering by a confused story" (63). But what would the nineteenth-century reader have made of all these constructs, in particular the thorny question of her sexuality? Before we can understand this we must look at another complicating strand: the Epistula Sapphus.

While the Testimonia were known in scholarly circles in the nineteenth century, Sappho's biography, or rather, her legend had become familiar, not through this channel, but largely through translations in the late seventeenth century of the Epistula Sapphus. This comprised a section of Ovid's Heroides, first discovered in 1440 and which later first appeared in Nicolaus Heinsius' edition of 1661. In the poem the shameless Sappho, poised on the Leucadian Cliff contemplates her own lyrical mastery, her former Lesbian lovers and her present uncontrollable passion for Phaon. Glen Most comments: "It is not hard to understand why this poem was able to provide not only specific details for enriching the legend of Sappho, but also a model of how to organise them within one fascinating story"(Greene RRS 18). The poem had the effect of succinctly bringing together the scattered tropes of Antiquity. In her detailed description of its history Greer comments on how literally early scholars took this poem, and how their reactions set a blueprint for constructing Sappho as a signifier of aberrant sexuality (122-134); she concludes:

Scholarly contempt for Sappho was based on four judgements, that she was over-sexed, that she was incontinent, verbally, emotionally, sexually, that she was a suicide and that she was a lover of her own sex, in more or less that order of importance...Sappho's reputation was both defined and degraded... (130).

It was really from this point that Sappho-associated texts began to proliferate; now they were no longer restricted to translation, or gleaned from the Testimonia, but also drew from reworkings of Ovid and the legend. It is the journey of these metamorphosing Sapphic texts and their evolution into nineteenth century constructs, that I trace next.

The Epistulus Sappho was responsible for furthering the development of significant Sapphic constructs that we have already met. For example, Sappho speaking from the Leucadian Cliff, ready to be broken into pieces by her leap, added a graphic dimension to the construct of fracture already apparent in the tropes of brokenness integral to her verse, (and augmented by her fragmented text and reception), while this new representation also spoke of her lability.

The idea of Sappho's musehood had been present since Antiquity.<sup>4</sup> It had persisted into the sixteenth century, for example, Thomas More reworked Plato's epigram: "Musas esse novem referent sed prorsus aberrant, / Lesbia iam Sappho Pieris est decima" (TSC 90). Since then, Sappho's text along with translations and reworkings had acted to affirm her status as exemplar of lyric, and had made her an implicitly embedded muse. Now, after the discovery of the Epistula Sapphus, her role as exemplar of lyrical mastery or muse, became further conflated with her role as signifier of sexuality: for example, early translations of Ovid now drew attention to Sappho, not only for her poetic mastery, but for her aberrant sexuality. Lipking comments,

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<sup>4</sup> For Sappho as a muse, see: "My name is Sappho and I surpassed women as greatly as Homer surpassed men in poetry" (Anth. Pal. 7.15; Campbell 46-47); "...a girl more learned than the Sapphic muse" (Anth. Pal 7.15; Campbell 46-47); "Aeolian earth, you cover Sappho who among the immortal muses is celebrated as the mortal muse" (Anth. Pal. 7.14; Campbell 26-27); "Some say there are nine muses: how careless! Look- Sappho of Lesbos is the tenth!" (Anth. Pal.9.506; Campbell 48-49). This last citation is attributed to Plato.

“Donne and Restoration wits who followed him can hardly bring together the idea of a poem and the idea of a female author without leering” (73).<sup>5</sup>

Such representations led the way for eighteenth century constructs of Sappho to become signifiers of pornography. In her chapter “Wanton Sapphics” Reynolds gives a number of instances of these (TSC 123-129): for example, in Moral Essays Alexander Pope used Sappho as signifier of the obscene to slander Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: “As Sappho’s diamonds with her dirty smock / Or Sappho at her toilet’s greasy task” (Epistle 2: 24-2; TSC 124). Not only had the nature of the muse now changed, but such metamorphoses added to constructs of Sapphic lability and aberrance.

New forms of performability would develop; Sappho’s legendary leap from the Leucadian Cliff was a performance on the grand scale, and The Epistula Sapphus drew attention to it, but the poem itself was also a performance by Ovid, and eighteenth century reworkings of Ovid prompted further complex instances of re-performance. Not only did Mary Robinson re-enact Sappho’s performance, but her forty-four sonnets “Sappho and Phaon (1797) employed Sappho in a melodramatic way to re-enact her own love affair and desertion by the Prince of Wales. There were actual performances utilizing the Epistulus Sappho which reinforced Sapphic aberrance in the form of burlesque, such as Alexander Radcliffe’s 1681 Sappho to Phaon: Ovid Travestie: A Burlesque Upon Ovid’s Epistles; such an obscene tone recalled the performance of Sappho in Athenian comedy.

So far in the chapter I have discussed different Sapphic constructs that grew out of Antiquity, and I have outlined their development in the Early Modern Period. I have found the same significant constructs of Sexuality, Aberrance, Fracture and Lability, constantly appearing, reappearing, overlapping and metamorphosing in both Primary and in Secondary text. I have also indicated Sappho’s performability and the emergence of a many-faceted muse. In looking at

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<sup>5</sup> John Donne’s imitation of the Epistula Sapphus “Sappho to Philaenis” (1597) has Sappho, now recovered from her love for Phaon, addressing Philaenis, whose name means “lover of girls”, a term which draws from Martial’s obscene reference to a “tribade” of that name.

these constructs I do not pretend that the nineteenth-century reader would have been familiar with all the texts I have mentioned; indeed they might have been familiar with very few, but I have referred to well-known texts that had been handed down, and which were readily available; and my purpose has been to show that each of these texts had become overlaid with a mass of associations and constructs that had become integral to the idea of Sappho, and which would become increasingly impossible to ignore.

Before I turn to the nineteenth century there is another, perhaps the most significant factor, to take into consideration: Sappho's association with the sublime. I spend some time over this, because nineteenth-century reception of Sappho was so strongly coloured by constructs emerging from Sappho's association with the eighteenth century sublime.

### **Sappho and the sublime**

Boileau's translation of Longinus' De Sublimitate had done more than re-ignite interest in Sapphic fragments, it had also served to associate her with the sublime. I quote the relevant section here in full, here because it was to assume so much importance in the eighteenth century, and would lay the basis for subsequent re-interpretations in the nineteenth.

Sappho, for instance, never fails to take the emotions incident to erotic mania from the symptoms which accompany it in real life. And wherein does she display her excellence? In the skill with which she selects and combines the most striking and intense of those symptoms. Is it not wonderful how she summons at the same time soul, body, hearing, tongue, sight, colour, all as though they had wandered off apart from herself? She feels contradictory sensations, freezes and burns, thinks unreasonably – for one that is at the point of death is clearly beside herself. She wants to display not a single emotion, but a whole congress of emotions. Lovers all show such symptoms as these, but what gives supreme merit to her art is, as I said, the skill with which she chooses the most striking and combines them into a single

whole. It is, I fancy, much in the same way that the poet in describing storms picks out the most alarming circumstances. (“On the Sublime” 10: 2-4; 157)

In the wake of Longinus’ De Sublimitate came Edmund Burke’s A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757).<sup>6</sup> In his work he would echo particular effect of the sublime described by Longinus, for example, he comments on the “richness and profuseness of images by which the mind is so dazzled as to make it impossible to attend to the exact coherence and agreement of the allusions...” (Part 2: Section 13; Phillips 72). But it was not simply her metrical dexterity and the subject matter of her verse that connected Sappho with the Sublime in the public imagination, it was also due to the fact that her Leucadian leap fulfilled another criterion as defined by Burke: “a mode of terror or pain, is always the cause of the sublime.” (Part 1: Section 7; Philips 124); such a response drew from a prospect that might be enjoyed “at certain distances and with certain modifications.” (Part 1: Section 7; Philips 36 - 37). In fact, contemplation of Sappho’s fateful leap provided exactly that. In her discussion of the sublime Maxwell argues that “Sappho is the figure who connects the Longinean and Burkean sublimines” (FS 93).

Sappho’s sublimity, then, derived from two sources, her technical mastery in describing the dizzying effects of eros, and the terror implicit in her dramatic suicide. Poets were eager to re-voke this Sappho’s Sublimity: in “Sappho: A Monodrama” (1793) Southey, for example, has Sappho declare “Tremendous height / Scarce to the brink will these rebellious limbs / support me.” The poem ends with the uncompromising words: “She throws herself from the precipice.” Such a depiction resonates with the implicit construct we noted earlier, Sappho’s sublimity, whether associated with her metrical skill or with her awe-ful fate, demonstrates an instance of dazzling performance.

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<sup>6</sup> The enormous influence that Longinus exerted and the plethora of writings on the subject that the sublime inspired is usefully described by Samuel Monk in The Sublime (63-83).

Apart from these obvious associations of Sappho with the sublime, there were also more subtle implicit aspects in the eighteenth century sublime that gave emphasis to other already received Sapphic constructs, ones that we have met earlier, and which began to further interweave ideas of sexual lability, masochism and fracture into the figure of the Sapphic muse. In Don Juan Byron juxtaposed Sappho's sublimity with other instances of literary exponents of sexuality:

“Ovid's a rake as half his verses show him,  
Anacreon's morals are a still worse example,  
Catullus scarcely had a decent poem,  
I don't think Sappho's ode a good example,  
Although Longinus tells us there is no hymn  
Where the sublime soars forth on wings more ample” (Canto 10: 111).

However, the sublime was more complex: it was concerned with sexual Lability. In his Enquiry Burke had associated the sublime with “those virtues which cause admiration: fortitude, justice, wisdom” (Part 3: Section 10; Phillips 100), i.e. with qualities perceived as specifically masculine, while the inferior category of the beautiful was associated with the feminine (Part 3: Sections 9-10; Phillips 100-101). However, three years after the publication of Burke's Enquiry Winckelmann published his Geschichte in which he refuted the ideas of sublimity as belonging to the sphere of the male: Alex Potts claims: “...for him it is not the male Apollo Belvedere, but the female Niobe whom he sees as the austere symbol of the Sublime”(115). He adds: “Winckelmann cannot view the male figure as sublime, only beautiful, so he substitutes the austere female figure [Niobe] heavily draped, a desexualised embodiment of the divine” (132). The labile sexuality implicit in the trope of the sublime resonated with Sappho's own: the masculinised female sublime finds its roots in Antiquity: “...temperat Archilochi musam pede mascula Sappho” (Horace: Epist.1. 19.28; 33-4).<sup>7</sup> Sexual lability, the sublime and Sappho as its signifier, had become inextricably, if subliminally intertwined.

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<sup>7</sup> “Sappho tempers Archilochus' muse with a masculine foot.” For these and other instances, see Campbell (8-9).

Sappho's sublimity also associated her with fracture: she constituted a sublime fragment of the Ancient World. Joseph Addison writing on sublimity in the Spectator in 1711, commented: "among the mutilated poets of antiquity, there is none whose fragments are as beautiful as those of Sappho" ("Essay" 223; Bond 365). Just as Sappho's construct of fracture established her sublimity, so her sublimity reinforced her construct of fracture: she was to be compared to "the trunc of a statue that has lost its Arms, Legs and Head" (Bond 390). Commenting on remarks such as these, Prins sees an even deeper association with fracture: "the fragmentary Sapphic corpus is therefore identified with the mutilation of the body..." (44). When Burke claims that "the idea of bodily pain, in all the modes and degrees of labour, pain, anguish, torment is productive of the sublime"(Part 2: Section 22; Phillips 79), or Winckelmann in discussing the Apollo Belvedere claims that "Sublime power was not an attribute of the god, but made manifest through its violent effects on the figure's body" (Geschichte 170), they refer to the same fracturing effect of masochistic pleasure that is described by Sappho in Fragment 130 in the form of eros, "the loosener of limbs", and in Fragment 31 when she describes "the trembling [that] shook me all over", and again in Fragment 47 when "love shook my heart like a wind falling on oaks on a mountain."

Although the sublime Sappho might be received as an object of fracture, whether through the effects of eros, or from her fall from the Leucadian cliff, she was also herself the agent of fracture, a creator of disruption: Dubois writes of her effect on us now: "she disorientates, troubles, undoes many of the conventional notions of the history of poetry, the history of philosophy, the history of sexuality" (25). This effect was realized by and commented on by Addison in Essay 223: "I do not know by the character that is given of her work, whether it is not for the benefit of mankind that they [the Fragments] are lost. They were filled with such bewitching tenderness and rapture that it might have been dangerous to give them a reading" (Spectator 1711 223; Bond 366). Fracture, Sexuality, Masochism, and Aberrance, all these constructs associated Sappho with the sublime. The Sapphic presence was beginning to be perceived as a dangerous one, and this dangerous presence would re-define itself in the form of the muse.

As we saw earlier Sappho had become an embedded muse, and her musehood conflated with her sexuality. With her association with the sublime, I suggest, Sappho returned in her “original” form, as one of the muses of Antiquity. These muses with their threatening characteristics, possessed a power akin to that exercised by the sublime. In “A Lover of his Art” Alan Sommerstein quotes Asklepiades speaking of a possible lost play of Aeschylus about Thamyris: “They challenged him to a song contest on the terms that if they won they could do as they pleased with him.... This was agreed to and the muses being victorious, took out his eyes” (168).

Such a display of emasculating power was now replicated in the effect of the Burkean Sublime since, as Jaqueline Labbe points out in Landscape, Gender and Romanticism, the moment of engaging with the sublime results in a weakening of male power and the experience produces a feminising effect (45-6). This connection between the dangerous Sappho and the sublime observed by Addison (see above), laid the roots for a further association to be made in the nineteenth century in the works of de Sade and other French writers. This will be discussed later.

### **Nineteenth-Century Reception**

I have spent some time looking at Sapphic reception prior to the nineteenth century; this has been necessary in order to show the complexity of the interlocking constructs which she would bring with her into this century, and to stress that she could not make an appearance without her genealogy making itself felt. I shall argue that Sappho’s appearance in the nineteenth is, in effect, a development from these constructs, particularly those that the sublime had reinforced. It is this metamorphosis of these constructs into the nineteenth century that I now consider and I start by looking at Sappho’s position in nineteenth-century Hellenism. Traditionally Sappho’s Greekness had been implicit rather than significant: However, intense nineteenth-century interest in the mores of the Greeks would draw attention to her association with the Ancient World, and a variety of Sapphic constructs would become newly apparent.



The reception of the Ancient World by the Victorians has been very thoroughly discussed by Richard Jenkyns in The Victorians and Ancient Greece and by Frank Turner in The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain, and they demonstrate the wide-spread appeal of the Ancient world, and show the many strands which constituted Victorian Hellenism.<sup>8</sup> On the one hand, through education, literature and scholarly interest, Greece came to constitute a sort of parallel world and was seen to furnish a paradigm of moral behaviour for the Victorians themselves: “If one of us were transported to Periclean Athens, provided he were a man of high culture,” wrote John Pentland Mahaffy, “he would find life and manners strangely like our own, strangely modern, as he might term it” (Greece from Homer to Menander 2-3). If fifth-century Athens was to be regarded as a shining example of enlightened democracy, Sparta could be utilized, as Linda Dowling has shown, to provide an exemplum of manly virtue (Hellenism and Homosexuality 32-67). On the other hand, however, there were aspects of the Greeks, particularly in regard to mythology, which constituted a distinct embarrassment. In A Manual of Mythology, we can see George Cox desperately trying to explain away obvious difficulties:

You may be sure there is in all these tales nothing of which in its old shape, we ought to be ashamed, and that when you have lifted the veil which conceals them, you will find only true and beautiful thoughts, which are as much ours as ever they were the thoughts of men who lived in that very early time. (3)

Although he was writing in 1868, Cox pinpoints for us the unspoken mid-Victorian attitude to myth and the Classics as a whole. As Feldman and Richardson argue, the Victorians “filtered myth through a mesh of sunny and decorous gentility” (301).<sup>9</sup> However, this filtering was a difficult business, as Margot Louis has shown, there grew up an interest in paganism, Chthonian deities and mystery cults, which, with their unsavory practices, could be regarded as even more

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<sup>8</sup> See particularly Turner Chapters 1 and 2 (1- 61) and 8 (369-414), and Jenkyns Chapter 8 (155- 174).

<sup>9</sup> In his influential History of Greece (1846) Grote described myth “as illustrating a state of psychological consciousness in humankind at a particular stage or moment in its intellectual history” (Turner 100). Mackay asserted “Mythology is poetry” (1:181); in 1856 Max Muller published his paper, Comparative Mythology and argued for myth as tales based on solar phenomena (101).

threatening than the “respectable” Olympian deities (Persephone Rises: 9-17). For educated mid-Victorians the Ancient World was Janus-like, presenting two opposite faces: on the one, it represented an admirable exemplar of civilisation, on the other, it represented a Dionysian world of violence, cruelty and sexual aberrance.

Sappho emerging like Venus from the waves of the Ancient World, represented a paradigm of Hellenism, and indeed, for Cox’s explication of it, since she was a visible symbol of all that was delightful in the Greek: a muse, a teacher and a poet who offered “true and beautiful thoughts”, but she also lay covered with many “veils”, in the form of aspects of aberrant sexuality, and she belonged to that other Greek world, that pre-dated the “respectable” one of 4<sup>th</sup> Century Athens, and which belonged to Dionysus and the darkness of myth. What Byron had earlier written in Canto 42 of *Don Juan*: “The isles of Greece, the isles of Greece! / Where burning Sappho loved and sung”, now encapsulated this attitude to Sappho: through her Greekness she was a signifier of lyrical respectability, but also of dangerous sexuality.

DeJean has shown how conflicting views on Sappho’s sexuality had become a particular issue for German and French scholarship in the nineteenth century (198-299); she argues that German scholars, while attempting to sanitise her reputation came, perhaps involuntarily, to associate her with nationalism and homoeroticism, while the French sought to represent her as an icon of modesty and purity.<sup>10</sup> In England these embarrassingly awkward constructs were given a new lability by a sort of fudging. John Mure in his Critical History of the Language and Literature of Ancient Greece (1850-1857) refuted the French sanitising view, but he further muddied the waters by his enthusiastic, yet confusing comment: “...her indulgence of the passion of love as of every other appetite, sensual or intellectual, while setting at nought all moral restraints, was marked by her own peculiar refinement of taste, exclusive of every approach to low excess or profligacy” (3:29). Sappho spelt sexuality, whatever spin one wanted to put on it. And increasingly she could be read as part of a secret code described by Richard Dellamora, Linda

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<sup>10</sup> For a more accessible approach see Greene RRS (122 – 145). Reynolds succinctly describes the conflicting takes on Sappho’s sexuality at this time in particular the influence exerted by the convoluted arguments of Friedrich Gottlieb Welcker (229-30).

Dowling and Thais Morgan, whereby Classics was used as a vehicle for discourse concerning different forms of sexual activity, particularly homoeroticism.<sup>11</sup> Dellamora, for instance shows how Pater “clearly signals the sexual context” through reference to Sappho: in his description of Simeon Solomon’s Bacchus (1867), he (Pater) claims: “the sea water of the Lesbian grape becomes somewhat brackish in the cup” (193). Sappho’s association with the Greek now served to highlight and reinforce previous constructs of sexuality and aberrance; it also translated her many constructs of fracture. She was now certainly more than Addison’s “trunc of a statue that has lost its Arms, Legs and Head”, and was ready to re-assert her dangerous presence in the person of a forceful muse.

When I discussed Sappho’s role in the sublime, I associated the ideas of the sadistic classical muse with the fracturing effect of the sublime, and I shall argue that the Nineteenth Century saw a further development in this particular construct of the Sapphic Muse, that she became seen and feared as a threateningly powerful insidious sexual female presence, not unlike her own description of eros in Fragment 130: “*αμαχανον ορπετον*”, “the bitter-sweet irresistible creature.”<sup>12</sup>

It was from France that this powerful female presence first emerged. While early nineteenth-century French interest had been eager to sanitise Sappho’s reputation and had even returned to the legend of two Sapphos, interest in Sappho’s homosexuality was revived by Deschanel’s Sappho et les lesbiennes (1847), and as DeJean comments: “immediately after its publication, the centre of speculation shifted not only from chastity to sexuality, but also from erudition to fiction” (234-5), and she describes how the period 1830-1850 saw a proliferation of texts privileging different sorts of dominatrices with Sapphic associations (266-710). Reynolds succinctly summarises:

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<sup>11</sup> Dellamora discusses this particularly in Chapters 3, 5 and 9; Dowling in Chapter 3, while Morgan examines this code in her chapter “Re-imagining Masculinity in Victorian Criticism” in Sexualities in Victorian Britain 146), and in her article: “Male Lesbian Bodies: The Construction of Alternative Masculinities in Courbet, Baudelaire and Swinburne”(Genders 15 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Campbell’s translation does not really give the force of “*ορπετον*” which literally translates as “a creeping thing.”

Paris was the scene for a new proscribing of Sappho's name. From about the 1830s to the 1850s lesbians were all the rage, whether in fictions like Théophile Gautier's Mademoiselle de Maupin (1835) and Honoré Balzac's La Fille aux Yeux d'or (1835) and Seraphitus-Seraphita (1854), or in real life salons where writers and independent women like George Sand were not above suspicion. (231)

Such novels extended the role of the lesbian to interest in other provocative sexual signifiers such as that of the androgyne, Theodore, for example, in Gautier's Mademoiselle du Maupin and Camille in Henri de Laouche's Fragoletta.<sup>13</sup> And the significant figure of the dominatrix emerged; while De Sade's, La Nouvelle Justine (1796) had concerned itself with (mainly) male sadism and violence, it was now the woman who was the agent: as Praz points out, in Flaubert's Salamambo (1862) "we have the beautiful male slave suffering unspeakable tortures under the eye of his goddess-like beloved, for with Flaubert we have entered the domain of the fatal woman, and sadism appears under the passive aspect which is usually called masochism...." (171). Sappho was now an embedded sexualised muse who privileged the effects of male masochism. This was a muse who echoed the effeminising effect of the sublime, and who bore a strong resemblance to the sadistic muses of Antiquity who put out Thamyris' eyes.

While this Sapphic muse provided a powerful sexually, labile presence dominating the French literary scene, in England this dominant female Sapphic Muse with the power to emasculate, was also becoming apparent, although in a different form. Maxwell comments, "In the Victorian period Sappho becomes an explicit element in the male poet's description of his role"( FS33), and she shows how Sappho exerted an effeminizing influence on the male poet: for instance, she argues that Tennyson in his two Sapphic poems, "Eleanore" and "Fatima" not only adopts a female voice but in the latter poem, a female persona, and she cites the usage of Sapphic

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<sup>13</sup> Baudelaire associates Sappho with androgyny in "Lesbos" (1857) when he refers back to Horace and speaks of "la mâle sapho, l'amante et le poete." ("The male Sappho, lover and poet"). Commenting on this Lipking remarks: "a masculine shadow falls over Sappho. Her uncanny strength – both as an author and as a woman brave enough to love other women – depends upon something perverse, less homosexual than hermaphroditic" (90).

fragments in Tennyson to suggest a merging between the male poet and female Muse (88). Matthew Arnold's "A Modern Sappho" (1849) shows a similar female dominance: written in the first person, the head that is "leant on the cold balustrade" lamenting the loss of her lover, now belongs not to Arnold, but to this new "modern" Sappho (116). Even Kingsley, that doyen of masculinity, disappears behind the towering female presence of Sappho in his 1847 poem of that name, as she meditates on the Leucadian rock prior to her suicide: "A mighty hunger yearned within her heart, / Till all her veins ran fever" (TSC 218).

While I am aware of the dangers of applying ideas of modern scholarship to nineteenth century thinking, nevertheless, I think the contemporary reader would have found it hard to avoid seeing an insidious effeminising Sapphic power at work, whereby the male poet loses his identity in the grip of a dominant female force. Indeed, as Maxwell has shown, the comments of contemporary critics, in particular Buchanan and Austin (to which I return in subsequent chapters) endorse this fear of "an improper female Sublime" (181).

There was nothing passive about this Sapphic presence, she was a pervasive force; this was a muse who performed, and I turn now to look at specific instances of her performance.

It was due to her interpretation by women poets that Sappho became particularly linked with the performative.<sup>14</sup> Reynolds comments: "...and yet to represent the woman in process, in performance is often the challenge and the goal in Victorian Sappho poems, for not only is Sappho just about to die; she also performs, she sings" ("I lived for art, I lived for love": The Woman Poet Sings Sappho's Last Song", Leighton 285).<sup>15</sup> These performances with their emphasis on Sappho's death drew from earlier constructs of the sublime as Sappho was again,

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<sup>14</sup> For example: Letitia Elizabeth Landon: "Sappho's Song" (1822); Caroline Norton: "The Picture of Sappho"; Felicia Hermans: "The Last Song of Sappho" and "Sappho's Song" (1830); Elizabeth Barrett-Browning: "A Vision of Poets" (1844); Mary Catherine Hume: "Sappho: A poem" (1862); Elizabeth Oakes-Smith "Ode to Sappho" (1848); Christina Rossetti: "Sappho" (1847); "What Sappho would have said if her leap had cured instead of killing her" (1848).

<sup>15</sup> Prins and Reynolds have explored the intentions of women poets in making these associations (Prins 174-245 and Reynolds 118), but these arguments are not relevant here; I merely want to show that these poets foregrounded Sapphic associations of performance and death.

now repeatedly, pictured on the Leucadian Cliff and the reader was invited to view the “sublime” act of a woman’s suicide. For example, Caroline Norton’s Sappho exclaims: “... from the Leucadian steep, / Dash with desperate leap / And hide thyself within the whelming waters.” There were more complex instances of Sapphic performance: for example, in 1807 Mme de Stäel, influenced by Alessandro Verri’s *Le Avventure di Saffo*, had written *Corinne*, a novel which concerned a modern Sappho, who acted as an “improvisatrice”, and in 1822 and 1827 the poet, Delphine Gray, (who had taken her name from the heroine of de Stael’s first novel), performed her own interpretation of Corinne/Sappho by giving public readings of her poems. Letitia Elizabeth Landon (LEL) gave a particularly poignant performance of Sappho: in her long poem “L’improvisatrice” she re-worked de Stael’s *Corinne*, and her heroine’s first poem was entitled “Sappho’s Song”, but her own life and death would echo the Sapphic legend: a poetic career, and an unhappy love affair followed by suicide. In this instance, performance of Sappho’s life had become intertwined with the performance of both women’s death. When women received the title “The *Something* Sappho”, as in the earlier case of Mary Robinson who was called the “English Sappho”, it was proof that they had in their various ways, performed Sappho and performed *as* Sappho, and that Sappho’s presence had empowered them and enabled a new dominant presence on the literary scene.<sup>16</sup>

As we have seen, Sappho had in different ways, always performed and *been* performed, and by the Nineteenth Century there was a long tradition of Sapphic theatrical performance, emphasizing different constructs. Early plays such as John Lyly’s court drama “Sappho and Phao” (1584) would have been largely unknown to the Victorians, but later plays and their Sapphic constructs were familiar. There were plays echoing the sublime such as Racine’s *Phèdre* (1677) whose heroine spoke a translation of Fragment 32, and performed the erotics of the doomed Sappho. There were numerous more modern French and German productions which further valorised the constructs of the sublime such as “Citoyenne” Pipolet’s *Sappho, tragédie mêlée de chants* (1794); there were German plays, featuring Sappho’s death, some of which like

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<sup>16</sup> Among others Lipking cites, Louise Labe, called “the Sappho Lyonnaise”; Aphra Behn, “the English Sappho”; Die Karschin, “the German Sappho”; Madame du Boccage, “the modern Sappho of France”; Eurica Dionigi, “the Sappho Lazia (97).

Franz Grillparzer's tragedy Sappho (1818) were translated for English audiences. On the other hand, the obscene burlesques of the eighteenth century (mentioned above) would doubtless have provided titillation in some quarters, and Sappho's sexuality had provided the subject for Charles-Louis Didelot's Sappho and Phaon, An Erotic ballet (1797). Opera offered a further dimension to Sapphic performance; there was Rossini's version of DeStäel's Sapphic Corinne, II Viaggio a Reims (1825), and Charles Gounod's political opera Sappho (1851). Further examples are given by Reynolds (TSC 196-7) and by DeJean (193-196) who discusses the political implications of such works. Such a plethora of Sapphic performances, familiar to the nineteenth century audience, vividly enhanced various constructs already familiar from written text, the sublime, the erotic, the aberrant, the Greek, and they spoke of Sapphic lability.

### **Visual Image and its Constructs**

I now turn to look at the Sapphic constructs offered by Visual Image. The subject is dealt with very thoroughly by Reynolds in her two books, The Sappho History and The Sappho Companion, and it is from these that I have chiefly drawn in this section. I have also referred to the work of Peter Tomory (131ff), and to that of David Robinson (101-118).

In Antiquity, Sappho was depicted in various vase paintings generally with her lyre, sometimes attended by Phaon, and occasionally in company with the poet Alcaeus. Robinson gives an exhaustive study of further representations from antiquity (101-108), and Dimitrios Yatromanolakis has dealt very fully with the topic in the chapter: "Ethnographic Archives of Vraisemblance" (51- 164). Williamson offers a succinct list (189-90), but alone of those cited, only the attic black-figure amphora (London b.163) was readily accessible in the British Museum, so it may well be that such images were unfamiliar in Nineteenth Century, although there would have been an awareness that some such artefacts existed. Other early representations include early illustrations to Boccaccio's De Claribus Mulieribus, and there is a Venetian woodcut of 1501 which shows her as a priestess; better known, would have been Raphael's Parnassus (1511- 12) on the walls of the Stanza della Segnatura in the Vatican. Beyond these rather obscure instances there was little of significance until the eighteenth

century, when interest in Sappho's appearance was stimulated anew by the 1758 discoveries at Pompeii, a statue, a mosaic and a tondo, all of which were erroneously thought to be of Sappho. The floodgates opened, Reynolds comments:

There were illustrated editions of Sappho and Anacreon, there were antiquarian novels which included pictures of Sappho, there were prints by Bartolozzi and Cipriani, there were paintings by famous artists like Fragonard, Angelica Kauffmann and George Romney and Jaques Louis David, statues by sculptors who were well known, like Canova and by others long forgotten, like Chinard and Dannecker. Sappho appeared regularly at the Paris Salon and at the Royal Academy, she was to be found in suites of engravings by Henry Tresham and Anne-Louis Girodet, she figured in private sketchbooks, on vases and cameos produced by Messrs Wedgwood and Bentley, on ormolu clocks, on transfer printed china and in schemes for interior decoration (TSH 55).

How, then, to sift through this mass of images which were available to the nineteenth century viewers and which acted to mould their particular constructs of Sappho? My aim is not to list and describe hundreds of images, but to indicate briefly that the constructs found in text were endorsed by those displayed in visual images and to show how they similarly interconnected with each other. I start with images that indicate sexuality and aberrance.

Earliest pictures from the eighteenth century placed Sappho in an erotic context: Angelica Kauffmann's Sappho inspired by Love (1775) and Fragonard's Sappho (1774) show her with breasts exposed to emphasize her sexuality. But, as in text, Sappho's sexuality was labile and she appeared both as icon of heterosexuality and of lesbianism. Numerous pictures of her throwing herself from the Leucadian Rock imply her heterosexuality, since her suicide is caused by her love for Phaon; Jacques Louis David's Sappho and Phaon (1809) shows her swooning into Phaon's arms, as he stands equipped with a phallic spear. But equally, she is depicted as a lesbian: Simeon Solomon's Sappho and Erinna in the Garden at Mytilene (1864) shows the two women embracing, and although there is nothing pornographic about it, the picture leaves the



viewer in no doubt as to their relationship. Other pictures were more explicit: Sappho and the Lesbian Maid (1806-1809) by the Danish artist Nicolai Abildgaard, shows two semi-naked women embracing. As we have seen in text, Sappho's sexuality was in a constant state of metamorphosis.

This metamorphosing sexuality also embraced Sappho's position as muse. From her earliest depictions in Antiquity, Sappho had possessed a visible "badge" of respectable musehood in the form of the lyre, but as Reynolds has shown, the early nineteenth century popular signification of the Sapphic muse by "ladies ... portrayed holding a lyre", gradually became debased, and by the middle of the century the lyre became not only a signifier of musehood, but of the erotic (TSC 195). For example, in Felix Barrias' Sappho d'Ereze (1847) Sappho lies naked on her bed, with a dreamy expression, one hand on her lyre which vies for prominence with, and offers an exaggerated suggestion of, her pubic area. James Pradier's sober 1848 statuette Sappho with Lyre spawned popular engravings where Sappho, still with her lyre, is now depicted the figure of the courtesan. Now, as in text, there was a conflation between the figure of the Sapphic muse and a signification of the erotic.

Such depictions, drawing attention to aberrant sexuality and musehood, pointed to Sappho's Greekness and its multifarious associations, a construct further embellished by copious depictions of Sappho poised on the Leucadian Cliff and which offered an actual depiction of the Longinian sublime: for example: Jean-Joseph Taillason's Sappho throwing herself from the Rock of Leucata (1791) and Baron Gros' Sappho (1801), her imminent suicide action flood-lit by moonlight. The viewer was invited to experience Sappho's suicide vicariously, and such depictions showed a continuing interest, not only in her sublimity, but also in her performability.

Depictions of Sappho poised on the Leucadian Cliff, showed a particular performance of her death, an act which echoed contemporary verse representations, particularly those by nineteenth century women poets and theatrical representations. However, Sappho's role as performer or performance did not rely on melodramatic representation or on depictions of her playing the lyre; any visual image was, in a sense, a new performance of her, just as any textual version was.

Such a variety of interpretations added to an awareness of Sapphic fracture and lability. The actual broken shards of vases and pots containing fragments of verse, and the scraps of papyrus that were known to contain bits of Sappho's verse, the comparatively recent discoveries at Pompeii, could all be viewed as visible evidence of Sapphic fracture. Depictions of Sappho on the Leucadian Cliff offered another glimpse of brokenness as they provoked the imagination to provide the picture of her body broken on the rocks beneath.<sup>17</sup>

Sapphic fracture and lability interconnect with each other since each fractured or fracturing image enabled a new Sappho to emerge. A Greek Sappho could metamorphose from aberrant woman poised on top of a cliff, to a muse with a lyre, and she could end up merged into the persona of an nineteenth-century woman, as in Portrait of Josephine Budaevskaya (1806) by Mlle Rivière, or Richard Westall's Portrait of the Artist's wife as Sappho (before 1802), thus replicating her textual transformations. Every representation of Sappho, whether in text or visual image presented another Sapphic metamorphosis and showed her protean Lability.

### **Summary of Sapphic constructs**

In this chapter I have traced a multiplicity of complex, overlapping and often opposing constructs in text and visual image which had become attached to Sappho by the 1860s, and which influenced her reception; and before I conclude, I very briefly summarise the most significant of them since they will form the bedrock of Swinburne's poetics in Poems and Ballads:1.

Sexuality and Aberrance:

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<sup>17</sup> Reynolds argues that depictions of Sappho's suicide, associated themselves with the popular vogue for pictures of fallen women such as George Cruickshank's 1836 series of engravings, "The Drunkard's Children" (TSH 76). Such depictions chimed with textual representation, as say, portrayed by in Dickens in David Copperfield, Wilkie Collins in The Moonstone, and George Eliot in The Mill on the Floss. Such an association offers another dimension to the idea of fracture, the fracturing of womanhood and its reputation.

Up until, and during the nineteenth century, Sappho's sexuality was heterosexual, homosexual or androgynous; she was a femme fatale, a dominatrix, a cross-dresser and an erotic victim; she signified sexuality, asexuality or pornography; and her sexuality was in a constant state of metamorphosis.

Lability:

Sappho's metamorphosing sexuality was only one form of various constructs of lability: she could suffer alteration at the hands of a poet or artist who strove to represent or re-present her; she could stand equally as a signifier of the sublime or the pornographic, the exemplar of lyric or the excuse for a snigger. She could appear as herself in primary text or become translated into secondary or associated text, undergoing a fresh metamorphosis with each translation.

The sublime:

As signifier of the sublime Sappho became associated with a diaspora of other constructs: metrical brilliance, labile gender, masochism, death, the erotic victim, the pitiless muse, and a signifier of performance.

The Greek:

Sappho's Greekness identified her with different often radically opposed attitudes towards the Ancient World which were becoming apparent by the nineteenth century. Now, through her lyrical authority she represented the respectable side of scholarship, but also threatened to reveal the unmentionable side of the Ancient World, the Dionysian, with its connotations of cruelty and raw sexuality; she was part of a sexual code which used the Classics to indicate various kinds of aberrance; her Greekness also associated her with the sublime, the figure of the muse and with fracture.

Fracture:

Sappho represented fracture through her verse fragments and the tropes of her verse, while the breaking of her body on the Leucadian rocks added a further dimension of brokenness, and associated her with the sublime; her appearances and reappearances through history and her

endless textual representations served to further fracture a homogenous image and showed her Lability.

#### The Muse:

Given the status of Muse in Antiquity, in the modern period Sappho became an embedded muse, a source of inspiration and a protagonist of her own work. During the eighteenth century her musehood became conflated with her sexuality. Her subsequent configuration in nineteenth-century France recalled the Greek muse as she became the signifier of dominant, aberrant female sexuality, while in England her aggressive sexual persona exercised a feminising influence over the male poet. On the other hand, she was adopted by women poets to express the tropes of performance and death.

#### Performance:

Sappho was initially associated with performance through her lyrical activity on Lesbos; in the Modern Period she was re-enacted in theatre, opera, ballet and by role play. Her legendary death was itself a performance which was subsequently acted and re-enacted in textual representation. Any new representation of Sappho was, in effect, a new performance of her.

This chapter has aimed to show the complex inheritance which Sappho brought to the nineteenth century, and the multiple constructs of her that were in a constant state of metamorphosis in that period. We have seen how legend and verse had become inseparably intertwined, so that Primary Text, Secondary text and Visual image produced a mass of constructs, interwoven, overlapping often contradictory, but so frequently recurring that no educated Victorian could approach Sappho or her verse, without their accompanying associations, (any more than we can today). I began this chapter with a heading adapted from the popular contemporary song, “Who is Sappho?” as it seemed to me that in her nineteenth century form she posed the same questions of identity as Sylvia: who was she, what was she, was she merely a lyrical cipher, a divinity or simply an erotic figure? As we have seen, there was no single answer; rather, a multiplicity of constructs of Sappho, notably her sexuality, her aberrance, her musehood, her sublimity, her Greekness, her fracture and her lability and, in this chapter, I have attempted to show the

complexity of the resonance that the word “Sappho” had for the educated mid-Victorian reader or viewer.

## CHAPTER 2 THE PROCESS OF SAPPHIC POSSESSION

In the last chapter I used the analogy of “Sappho soup” and showed the extraordinary range of Sapphic constructs that were available in the mid-nineteenth century. Swinburne’s own extensive Classical education, linguistic abilities, wide reading and interest in art, made him peculiarly aware of this *mélange*, and in this chapter I aim to show that Sappho had a very particular significance for him, one that went far beyond that offered by his education, and which would gradually develop into an obsession with her, and possession by her. My purpose is twofold: firstly to delineate a process that would, I shall argue, enable Swinburne to compose Poems and Ballads: 1, and secondly, to lay the foundations for the subsequent chapters in which I shall demonstrate how Swinburne’s immersion in Sappho and his possession by her, was to become the driving force in the volume, and offer a poetics that would be highly provocative.

There were, I shall argue, three main reasons for Swinburne’s attraction to Sappho, and I shall term them factor a), factor b) and factor c) in future reference to them. The first two of these factors would appear to be diametrically opposed: a) that Swinburne felt a peculiar personal affinity with Sappho, even a kinship to her, and b), that he viewed her as the signifier of the sublime, the glittering other which fascinated him, but which he knew was beyond his reach; this other would encompass i) an enticing array of sexual constructs, often of sexual aberrance, and ii), a muse figure whose lyrical mastery he longed to emulate. The two personae were frequently to become conflated, as indeed, they had been historically, as I demonstrated in the last chapter. I shall further argue that in the course of experiencing these strong influences which accompanied his emotional and poetic development, Swinburne increasingly looked to Sappho as a refuge from his anxieties, and ultimately as a sexual substitute. I term these forms of dependency factor c). My purpose is to show how these factors operated on Swinburne and led to possession by his particular Sapphic muse.

I shall not attempt to put Swinburne into a Sapphic strait jacket, but I shall aim to show how in these early years Swinburne showed himself increasingly to be the creature of Sappho. As I cannot hope to cover every part of Swinburne's life in the limited space of one chapter, I shall select various significant points in his early life, and show how he "met" and recognized Sappho or came across experiences where he had need of her.

Although I would like – for the sake of clarity – to deal with factors a, b and c separately, there is a constant oscillation between them and an inextricable mingling of these impulses, that makes it impossible to do so in all cases; furthermore, Sappho's elusiveness, the Lability that was discussed in the last chapter, constantly asserts itself: during the course of this possessive process Sappho would, through chance occurrences, appear, disappear and re-appear, apparently at will, metamorphosing from one persona to another and exercising various degrees of power over him. We shall see how some aspects of this Sapphic muse are particularly dominant, as for example, the nightingale and the dominatrix, but that all belong to the larger Sapphic recurrent constructs that we saw in the last chapter: Fracture, the Greek, Aberrance, the Sublime and Lability.

### **Early Intimations of Sappho**

In this first section I look at the intimations of Sappho that Swinburne gained as a child growing up in the family home, East Dene, *before* he came to know of the poet's existence, and I shall try to show how his childhood already offered constructs which he would only later come to identify as Sapphic, but which even then, he experienced through forms of affinity (factor a), the sublime other (factor b), and as a source of refuge and outlet for his awakening sexuality (factor c). I look at, what I see as three major sources of Sapphic influence that emanate from his childhood years at East Dene: i) the Sea, ii) the nightingale, iii) his cousin, Mary Gordon.

Although the child Swinburne was as yet unaware of the name "Sappho", he was literally born into a Sapphic topos, not only because The Isle of Wight shares with Lesbos the property of being a small island off the mainland, but because East Dene itself constitutes a kind of island;

indeed, when I Visited East Dene some years ago, I was immediately struck by its womb-like ambience. In his biography Algernon Charles Swinburne Edmund Gosse tells us:

The rambling gardens and lawns of East Dene descend southward to the seashore, divided from it only by the masked path that leads to Luccombe, and so they practically shelve from the great trees in the shadow of the Under-cliff down to the shingle and the seaweed. The view from the house south-east is over limitless ocean.  
(6-7)

Swinburne describes such a position in “The Forsaken Garden”:

In a coign of the cliff between lowland and highland,  
At the sea-down’s edge between windward and lee,  
Walled round with rocks as an inland island,  
The ghost of a garden fronts the sea...

Without knowing it, the child Swinburne shared a topographical affinity with Sappho (factor a) since both were island dwellers for whom the sea would prove to be of paramount importance. Much has been written about Swinburne and the sea and it will not serve any useful purpose here to go over old ground again, because discussion tends to focus on its effect on him later as a poet. My purpose is to show that the presence of the sea in Swinburne’s *early* years, offered constructs that he would later identify as Sapphic.

Swinburne writes of his earliest memories of the sea:

As for the sea, its salt *must* have been in my blood before I was born. I can remember no earlier enjoyment than being held up naked in my father’s arms and brandished between his hands, then shot like a stone from a sling through the air, shouting and laughing with delight, head foremost into the oncoming wave. I remember being afraid of other things, but never of the sea. (Lang 3:12)



In this comment we can see the same processes taking place that would act on him during the course of Sapphic possession: he feels an instinctive affinity with the sea: “its salt *must* have been in my blood before I was born” (factor a). The final remark concerning his lack of fear of the sea compared with other unspecified fears, and his readiness to immerse himself in it, suggests an early perception of it as a source of comfort, as Sappho herself would be (factor c). But the overriding attraction of the experience comes through factor b, and its effect can be compared with the Burkean sublime, as offering means of vicariously enjoying terror and pain (Phillips 72). The phraseology is reminiscent of Sappho’s own sublime: we can compare Swinburne’s words with Strabo’s comments on Leucas .... “where they say that ‘Sappho first,’ as Menander puts it, ‘hunting the haughty Phaon, threw herself in her goading desire from the far-seen cliff...’”(Geography 10: 2.9; Campbell 23). There is the same juxtaposition of pleasure and pain: Sappho experiences the pleasure of desire as a goad, while Swinburne is “shouting and laughing with delight”, as he experiences the pleasure/pain of hitting the oncoming wave “head foremost.”

As we saw in the last chapter, the Sappho-associated sublime exacted a masochistic response, and in Lesbia Brandon, Swinburne describes how his hero Herbert Seyton, (his own alter ego), now somewhat older than in the incident recounted above, experiences a more fully-realised masochistic pleasure from the sublime in his encounters with the waves:

He panted and shouted with pleasure among the breakers where he could not stand two minutes, the blow of a roller that beat him off his feet made him laugh and cry out in ecstasy...he rioted in the waves like a young sea beast sprang at the throat of waves that threw him flat, pressed up against their soft fierce bosoms and fought for their sharp embraces, grappled with them as lover with lover, flung himself upon them with limbs that laboured and yielded deliciously, till the scourging of the surf made him red from the shoulders to the knees and sent him on shore whipped by the sea into a single blush of the whole skin, breathless and untried... (16)

This description not only denotes the masochistic pleasure in the sublime, but the words “blow”, “beat”, “scourging”, “red from the shoulders to the knees”, “whipped”, “blush of the whole skin” suggest an early intimation of the masochistic pleasure he would later derive from the metrical discipline of Sappho at Eton. As Lafourcade comments: “La mer inflige donc une souffrance corporelle et cette souffrance ressemble généralement á une flagellation” (1: 51).<sup>1</sup> But here I am concerned with Swinburne’s pre-Sappho days, a time when, as a child, he only *sensed* in the sea the paradoxes he would later meet in Sappho: a familiar presence (factor a); a sublime source of terror that could inflict masochistic pleasure (factor b); a source of almost maternal comfort in which he could immerse himself and also a provider of vicarious sexual satisfaction, as he “grappled with them [the waves] as lover with lover” (factor c). Later he would identify and conflate these early intimations with Sappho in his expressed desire “to satiate my craving (ultra Sapphic and plusquam Sadic) lust after the sea” (Lang 1: 305).

The second Sapphic intimation that I shall discuss, that of the nightingale, has much in common with the sea. In a letter to Clarence Stedman written in 1875, Swinburne comments: “I grew up a healthy boy enough and fond of the open air” (Selection from the Poetical Works 263), and it is reasonable to assume that his first encounter with the song of the nightingale took place in his ramblings about East Dene. In the poem “On The Cliffs” (1879), Swinburne describes how he recognised the extraordinary power of the nightingale *before* he discovered that the bird was, in fact, traditionally associated with Sappho, (as described in the previous chapter), and *before* he came to make his own identification of the two: “Even when I *knew not* – even *ere sooth was seen*, / When thou wast but the tawny sweet-winged thing / Whose cry was but of spring” (emphasis added).<sup>2</sup> As he listens to the song, the child Swinburne experiences the same dazzling and disorientating effect that he will later experience in Sappho’s verse: “I knew not whence I knew / This was the song that struck my whole soul through.” The adult Swinburne identifies this song as an early (subliminal) experience of actual Sapphic text: “since thy first *Lesbian*

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<sup>1</sup> “The sea, then, inflicted a bodily suffering, very much like flagellation.”

<sup>2</sup> In “Swinburne Among the Nightingales” Meredith Raymond describes this poem and “Thalassius” in terms of “the autobiography of the *poetic* spirit” (126) see also William Rutland (320-3). I discuss the implications of the autobiographical aspects of these poems in Chapter 4.

word / Flamed on me.” The nightingale’s song with its Sapphic tropes of *ποθος* (painful yearning) produce on him the same masochistic demands of the sublime that he experienced in the sea: the “keen” “Lesbian word” “flamed”, “struck”, “pierced”, as it also brought joy” “with its great anguish of its great delight.”

While these early impressions of the Sapphic nightingale represented a sense of the sublime with its associations of sexuality and masochism (factor b), they also were part of his feeling of affinity with her (factor a). Swinburne, like the nightingale, like Sappho, belonged to the sea and the cliffs; he even shared Sappho’s avian persona since he was known in his family as sea gull or “sea mew”. His cousin, Mary Disney-Leith (née Gordon and hereafter referred to as Gordon) remarks that he loved to speak of seagulls “as being his brothers and sisters”(15), and in the poem he actually claims an avian relationship to the nightingale: “Brother and sister were we, / Child and bird.” It was the same sense of consanguinity he had experienced in the sea when he claimed: “its salt *must* have been in my blood.” Out of this feeling of affinity grew a feeling that the nightingale would understand him, and provide the comfort of empathy, (factor c): “My heart has been as thy heart, and my life / As thy life is, a sleepless hidden thing / Full of the thirst and hunger of winter and spring.”

It was then, at East Dene that Swinburne first unknowingly “met” Sappho, but the place was not only a beautiful island that offered sublime instances of nature, later to be closely associated with her, but it was also, like Lesbos, a topos of sexual aberrance, not through lesbianism, but through the incestuous nature of Swinburne’s family whose home it was. His cousin, Mary Gordon explains:

Our mothers (daughters of the third Earl of Ashburnham) were sisters, our fathers, first cousins – more alike in characters and tastes, more linked in closes friendship, than many brothers. Added to this, our paternal grandmothers – two sisters and co-heiresses – were first cousins to our common maternal grandmother, thus our fathers were also second cousins to their wives before marriage. Whether this complexity of

relationship had anything to do with the strong sisterly tie that always existed between the Swinburne cousins and myself, I cannot say... (3-4)

The two families were close geographically too. “The Orchard” at Niton, the home of the Gordons was five miles away from East Dene, and “Northcourt” the home of Gordon’s grandfather was at nearby Shorwell. It was, I shall argue, from his childhood association with his cousin that Swinburne obtained a variety of early Sapphic associations of sexual aberrance, (I discuss the effect of the adult Gordon below). In later life both Swinburne and Gordon would express and define their relationship in terms of siblings: Swinburne was to write of Gordon in his dedication of Rosamund: “Scarce less in love than brother and sister born, / Even all save brother and sister sealed at birth.” Gordon, for her part, writes “Cousin Hadji [Swinburne] ... was to me an elder brother, a loved and sympathetic playmate.....” (11). She claims: “.... there was never, in all our years of friendship, an ounce of sentiment between us ... Any idea of the kind would have been an insult to our brother-and-sister footing...” (4-5). However, that this was patently not the case can be seen from Swinburne’s later, now well-attested, marriage proposal (discussed below), and from Gordon’s own novels with their Swinburnesque heroes. As Henderson shows, Swinburne’s own novels, Love’s Cross-Currents: A Year’s Letters and Lesbia Brandon, replicate the hot house atmosphere of his own family, and paint vivid pictures of incestuous relationships (95-105).<sup>3</sup> Gordon was, in fact, a product of this, and it was, I shall argue, from this sexualized sister that Swinburne gained an early taste for Sapphic aberrance. To support this theory, I turn to the early poem “Hide and Seek” (1856-60), which describes the provocative behaviour of a sexually hungry nymphette tempting a young boy. It begins:

Under the large flags of the brimming river  
There I found her hiding from the rest,  
Where the molten sunrays slide and shiver,

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<sup>3</sup> The earlier part of Lesbia Brandon recounts Herbert’s incestuous love for his sister Margaret. I offer one particularly striking example: “Kneeling with his face lifted to hers, he inhaled the hot fragrance of her face and neck, and trembled with intense and tender delight. Her perfume thrilled and stung him; he bent down and kissed her feet, reached up and kissed her throat....” (Hughes 82-3).

Where the bulrush perks his powdery crest  
Like a wild white bird when the hunter's near her,  
Shrank she laughing in the long green reeds,  
Shrank she laughing more as I drew nearer,  
Hiding her laugh in the long wet flowering reeds.

Although the poet cannot be explicit, later in the poem he uses synecdoche to indicate that the girl is naked: "...her wee pearl feet were dripping from the river, / Naked and wet on the wet water-reeds"; emphasis is given to erogenous zones: the reeds "strayed and clung" over "cheek and bosom". Finally, the girl reveals delighted consciousness of her power: "Up she leapt in a light of laughs and blushes /...and shook straight her dripping hair." It seems likely that such a teasing incident actually took place: John S. Mayfield comments: "...it was composed during his undergraduate days ... and occupies three of the 182 pages of a leather-covered notebook" (unnumbered page). He argues that this undergraduate composition suggests the recollection of a vivid and intense memory of childhood sexual awakening, and in which, even then, Swinburne proved sexually inadequate (12-13). Of course, there is no proof that the nymphette was Gordon or even a version of her, but it seems a reasonable supposition since the Cipher Letters exchanged between them in the 1890s, suggest an extraordinarily strong and exclusive childhood relationship.<sup>4</sup>

But what had incestuous relationships at East Dene, whether of parents or cousins, to do with Sappho? How were they early intimations of her? I suggest that aberrant sexuality was all around Swinburne at East Dene, in fact it replaced conventional sexuality, since his mother, father and cousin/sister all signified sexuality as defined by incest. Later, when Swinburne came to contemporary French literature, he would find the connection between incest and Sappho confirmed through the Sapphic heroines of, say, Henri de Latouche's *Fragoletta*, and notably Balzac's *La fille aux Yeux d'Or*, whose Paquita Valdès provides a notable conflation of

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<sup>4</sup> The letters continued for more than a decade from 1892, and can be found in Volume 3 of "The Uncollected Letters"; for a discussion of them, see Henderson (266-269).

lesbianism and incest. His obsessive interest in these Sapphic figures must surely have had its roots here at East Dene.

Gordon would introduce Swinburne to other forms of sexual aberrance associated with Sappho. She was to be a blueprint for the dominatrix who would become the defining characteristic of the Sapphic muse. In his article “Swinburne’s Prose Heroines and Mary’s Femmes Fatales” F.A.C. Wilson has shown that heroines of Gordon’s novels reveal her interest in sadism, and that in two of her novels, Nora’s Friends and Undercliff, Gordon’s Swinburnesque hero is tormented by his half-sister Irene. Such a picture is echoed by Swinburne in The Sisters (1896). Here we see Mabel speaking to her suitor, Reginald, with whom she has been brought up:

Well, you always were the best to me;  
The brightest, bravest, kindest boy you were  
That ever *let a girl misuse him*- make  
His loving sense of humour, courage, faith,  
Devotion *rods to whip him*- literally  
You know – and never by one word or look  
Protested. (emphasis added)

The “rods” used to whip Reginald are telling, in view of Swinburne’s future penchant for flagellation.<sup>5</sup> Amongst comments about the delights of her childhood, Gordon privileges the “abundance of ponies to ride.” She adds: “I have alluded to his [Swinburne’s] fondness for riding, an amusement which we often shared” (17). This was not the innocent pastime the remark suggests: Wilson comments: “Mary’s Femmes fatales are habitually associated with the riding whip” (249). Gordon herself writes:

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<sup>5</sup> Swinburne often used the name as a synonym for himself. Reginald Harewood features in Loves Cross-Currents and the floggee in his flagellation writing is often similarly named. In the Cipher Letters, both Swinburne and Gordon refer to “Redgie”, perhaps with reference to the Swinburnesque hero of Gordon’s Trusty in Flight who is also called Reginald.

I had my first impressions of Macaulay's "Lays of Ancient Rome" from him [Swinburne]. I was always fond of Roman history as a child. And the spirited sounding periods of the lays repeated to me by Algernon – often when we were riding together – took a lively hold of my imagination (10).

McGann has Woodbury comment, "she may even have visited upon her cousin a few friendly whippings" (211).<sup>6</sup> This equestrian association between the beating of metre, the Classics and flagellation, was one Swinburne was to re-discover and associate with Sappho at Eton. In 1848 Swinburne was being crammed in Classics for entrance to the school by the Reverend Foster Fenwick, and he saw his cousin frequently as Brooke Rectory was near to Northcourt. Gordon writes: "We had a great time together, and used to run up and down a long passage, nominally "playing at horses", but usually, if I remember, acting "people" as well". (7) Is it too fanciful to suggest that there grew an association in the boy's mind between his initiation into the Classics at the onset of puberty, and Gordon's "horse games" with their dubious connotations; and that sexuality, the Classics and the dominatrix became conflated; that it was here that he first discovered the origins of Baudelaire's Lesbos where Sappho's island is described as "Mère des jeux latins et des voluptés grecques" ?<sup>7</sup>

Swinburne's relationship with Gordon offered yet another early intimation of Sappho, that of gender-crossing. In the Cipher Letters which re-enact childhood fantasies, Mary refers to herself as "your mi"(public school slang for "minor"), in other words, she presents herself as a childhood *brother* or cross-dressed sister. There was, in fact, an actual instance of cross-dressing and role reversal in their childhood: when Swinburne was eleven he adapted Dickens' Dombey

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<sup>6</sup> Gordon was to continue to be a fearsome horsewoman all her life. In 1899 during the course of the Cipher Letters we find Swinburne writing to her "of the pleasure of reading your delightful contribution to 'The Stable'." This remark refers to Gordon's article on Icelandic ponies in Stable and Kennel Illustrated (1899); in the article she recounts her own experiences of driving Icelandic ponies and of bringing them back to England (UL 140-141). She expresses their mutual interest in bloodthirsty games: "We still have good accounts of Disney, he has got ten days leave for a stig icking which he seems to have enjoyed. Wdnt Fred and Redgie like to have been in the company? To say nothing of a poor fool [i.e. herself]" (UL: 9<sup>th</sup> May 1895).

<sup>7</sup> "Mother of Roman games and Greek pleasures."

and Son for a family performance. He took the part of Mrs. Skewton while Gordon took that of Carker, (Gordon 8).

Lesbia Brandon reveals to what an extent the intertwining tropes of cross-dressing, incest and the dominatrix had belonged to Swinburne's childhood: as Henderson comments: "Herbert Seyton [the young hero] is a self- portrait. ....There is much play with the sexual ambiguity, sado-masochism, transvestitism and the incest motive" (96). It would seem obvious to cite the novel's name as evidence of a childhood dominated by Sapphism, but the manuscript is very fragmented, parts of it lost and gathered together by the vituperative Randolph Hughes, and it was he who gave it the title; however, Swinburne's choice of the name Lesbia remains significant, and in the erratic course of the novel he allows the figure of Margaret to become subsumed into that of Lesbia, as indeed he would later subsume Gordon into Sappho.<sup>8</sup>

In this section I have indicated that during the course of his East Dene childhood, Swinburne received various, as yet unidentified, constructs of Sappho drawn from factors a, b and c: the sea and the song of the nightingale offered aspects of the sublime with their associations of masochism and fracture, but also familiarity and reassurance. From Gordon he received complex constructs of aberrant sexuality, both familiar and exciting: the sexually predatory female, the incestuous sister, the dominatrix and the cross-dresser, and one who intimated forbidden aspects of the Ancient World.

### **Sappho at Eton:**

In this section, I look at the development of these early intimations and show how they became associated with Sappho through factors a, b and c, and how other Sapphic constructs evolved from them; and I demonstrate how Swinburne's embracement of them, forwarded the process of Sapphic possession.

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<sup>8</sup> Lafourcade comments: "Son admiration pour Sappho ne semble pas limitée aux quelques fragments qui sont attribués à la poétesse et ce n'est pas pour rien que l'héroïne de son principal roman se nomme Lesbia Brandon."(LJ: 1:263). "His admiration for Sappho does not seem to have been limited to the poetess and it is not without reason that the heroine of his most significant novel is called Lesbia Brandon."



It was at Eton that Swinburne would come to identify his childhood response to the nightingale with Sappho, indeed the bird flew at him in many forms. It may well be that an early association between lyric and the nightingale came through William Johnson (later known as William Cory) who taught Swinburne for two years, since in his own famous verse reworking of Heraclitus, he uses the classical conceit of poetry as nightingale: “Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales awake, / For Death he taketh all away, but them he cannot take” (Oxford Book of English Verse 705). A more complicated dimension was added through Swinburne’s study of Aeschylus in which he learned of the associations between the nightingale and the doomed figure of the prophetess Cassandra. (Agamemnon 1142-1149). The legend of Philomela would have enhanced the sublime horror that he had sensed innate in the birdsong. More modern renditions of the nightingale offered themselves in the poetry of Coleridge, Shelley and Keats. A further Sapphic link was provided by Matthew Arnold whose recently published verse Swinburne carried in his pocket. Maxwell points out his 1853 “The Nightingale” echoes the antithetical emotions of Sapphic lyric” (36). But it was through his study of the newly published Poetae Graeci: Pars 11 (1849) that he was to learn to associate Sappho the poet and Sappho the nightingale, and where he would have discovered her own nightingale allusions (Fragments 135 and 136).<sup>9</sup> And his reading of Ovid’s Heroides would have provided a further association of Sappho with the bird (Ovid. Her.15. 153-155).<sup>10</sup> Finally, in the school holidays he made the actual connection:

I don’t think I ever told you did I? My anti-Ovidian theory as to the real personality of that much-misrepresented bird - the truth concerning whom dawned upon me one day in my midsummer school holidays, when it flashed upon me listening quite

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<sup>9</sup> For Swinburne’s attraction to Sappho through this text see Lafourcade (ALB 32-33) and Gosse (ACS 24).

<sup>10</sup> “sola virum non ultra pie maestissima mater / concinit Ismarium Daulias ales Itynales Ityn / ales Ityn, Sappho desertos cantat amores /...” “ Only the Daulian bird, most mournful mother who wreaked unholy vengeance on her lord, laments in song Ismarian Itylus. The bird sings of Itys, Sappho sings of love abandoned.”

suddenly (1) that this was not Philomela (2) in the same instant who this was. (Lang 4: 77-8).<sup>11</sup>

The East Dene nightingale was now identified and given a name-tag, “Sappho”: “...the very words of Sappho...heard and recognised in the notes of the nightingales” (“Dedicatory Epistle” Hyder SR 101). The nightingale’s song in all its sublimity had been made manifest by Sappho’s verse: “divine words which even as a boy I could not but recognise as divine” (Notes; Hyder SR 20), but as the nightingale’s song had been more than exquisite sound as it had “pierced him” with its beauty, now he would see a parallel in Sappho: “her verses strike and sting the memory in lonely places or at sea” (Notes; Hyder SR 21). He had become aware of two interlocking forms of Sapphic sublimity: exquisite workmanship and her ability to evoke a masochistic pleasure.<sup>12</sup> Nor was this effect confined to the verse, the realization of its beauty would be accompanied by actual pain.

In her important chapter “Swinburne’s Sapphic Sublime” Prins has shown how the absorption of Classical metre was intricately bound up with Sappho and brought in its wake constructs of masochism and fracture. She comments:

...her verses introduce what I would call the Sapphic scene of instruction. It is a primal scene surcharged with libidinal investments that make his initiation into Classical learning both pain and pleasure: not merely a translation from Greek into English, but a stern discipline enforced by corporal punishment. (121-122)

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<sup>11</sup> Swinburne was to corroborate this further: in 1879 Stedman found Swinburne working on the poem, “On The Cliffs”, he (Stedman) writes, “...it grew out of a night in Italy – I think he said in Fiesole – where he was kept awake by the nightingales, and fancied their song bore a resemblance a famous line of Sappho’s, and as if the soul of the Lesbian poet had passed into the transmitted line of the *μεροφωνος αηδων*, ‘lovely-voiced nightingale’ (“Harpers Monthly” 890). This is fully discussed by Maxwell (40-41). See also Rutland (321-322) and Raymond (126-7).

<sup>12</sup> This is the sublime that Burke (echoing Longinus’ description of Sappho) described as the “richness and profuseness of images by which “the mind is so dazzled as to make it impossible to attend to the exact coherence and agreement of the allusions”(50).

She argues that this business of learning Sappho and the effects of metre, “incorporating their rhythm into his own punished body,” was a masochistic exercise that replicated the pleasure/pain which Swinburne had earlier experienced in the beating of the waves on his body as he swam (125). It was the same reaction that he had experienced in the nightingale’s song. Indeed, the very effect of flagellation could now be conflated with the tropes of Sappho’s verse. For example, the lines of fragment 130 “Once again limb-loosening Love makes me tremble, the bitter-sweet irresistible creature”, could well describe the bitter-sweet nature of the masochistic pleasure involved in flagellation, and the trembling and “limb–loosening” effects it produced. Indeed, Swinburne’s reactions to Sappho and to flagellation were identical. Gosse tells us that the former gave him “pleasure of an ecstatic kind” (ACS 25), while the latter “afforded him pleasure of an ecstatic nature” (Lang 6: 294). The business of flagellation and Sappho’s role in it, offered factors a) and b) (familiarity and a sense of the sublime), and it would also provide for factor c) (a refuge and sexual substitute). It represented one form of eros described by Sappho as “αλγεσιδωρον”, the pain-giver (Fragment 172).

In describing the boy Herbert’s feelings on being sent away to school, Swinburne writes:

It was rather a physical than a sentimental pain, he felt the sharp division and expulsion, the bitter blank of change, like a bad taste or smell. Away from home and the sea and all common and comfortable things, stripped of the lifelong clothing of life, he felt as one beaten and bare... it was very bitter and dull to him to be taken up and dropped down into the heart of a strange populous place. (Lesbia Brandon 84-5)

However, for Swinburne homesickness was only part of the story: this “strange and populous place” offered a more obvious “bad smell”: a sense of inferiority. What Swinburne (significantly) does not replicate in the boy Herbert, is his own physical peculiarity. His cousin, Lord Redesdale describes him as “strangely tiny.” He adds:

.... His limbs were small and delicate; and his sloping shoulders looked far too small to carry his great head, the size of which was exaggerated by the touzled mass standing out almost at right angles to it.....His features were small and dainty as

those of some Greek sculptor's masterpieces. His skin was very white – not unhealthy, but a transparent tinted white such as one sees in the petals of some roses. (Gosse: 319 )<sup>13</sup>

It must have been obvious from the start that Swinburne was different, and difference is unforgivable among children. Osbert Sitwell refers to an incident when the head boy of the time commented, “pointing to a little fellow with red hair, ‘kick him if you are near enough, and if you are not near enough, throw a stone at him’” (Noble Essences 113). However unpleasant Swinburne's initiation at Eton may have been, his adolescent years must have proved more difficult and further alienated him from his contemporaries: he was in a society of teenage boys busy discovering their own sexuality.<sup>14</sup> Such behaviour must have both frightened and fascinated the boy Swinburne, because the “strangely tiny figure” had not developed or matured since puberty.

Surrounded by sexual fervour but unable to understand or take part in it, Swinburne had latched on to flagellation, not only did it provide the familiarity of Sappho, (factor a), but since it was an act which he himself had undergone, he could talk knowledgeably about it, as indeed, he was so tediously to continue to do throughout his life, Croft- Crooke comments: “what a bore he must have been about it in conversation as well as in his letters” (23). The subject of flagellation with Sappho's presence hovering behind it, provided a spurious sexual knowledge: it enabled him to be one of the boys, and it afforded a refuge from the unpleasantness that difference provokes

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<sup>13</sup> Gosse quotes Lord St Aldwyn offering a less charitable view: “.... a horrid little boy with a big red head and a pasty complexion who looked as if a course of physical exercises would have done him good”( 14).

<sup>14</sup> We might compare John Addington Symonds description of life at Harrow during the same period:

One thing at Harrow very soon arrested my attention. It was the moral state of the school. Every boy of good looks had a female name, and was recognized either as a public prostitute or as some bigger fellow's “bitch”. Bitch was a word in common usage to indicate a boy who yielded his person to a lover. The talk in the dormitories and the studies was incredibly obscene. Here and there one could not avoid seeing acts of onanism, mutual masturbation, the sports of boys in bed together. (94)

(factor c).<sup>15</sup> But flagellation was much more than this: it was a personal manifestation of his own Sapphic dominatrix.

The demands of Sapphic metre, both in itself and its enforcement with the rod, had extended Sappho's authority as erotic pain-giver, and now cast her in the role of female disciplinarian.<sup>16</sup> He comments: "We in England are taught, are compelled under penalties to learn, to construe and to repeat the imperishable and incomparable verses of that supreme poet" (Hyder SR 20). Such a figure can be seen to constitute a new form of the dominatrix, one which was to become increasingly important to Swinburne. This "Metre Mistress" was a development of the figure of Mary Gordon who had ridden at Swinburne's side, plying her whip, as he declaimed the rhythmic verses of Macaulay.

Sappho's powers had deep roots which primarily devolved from the Ancient World, and I see Catullus as having a particular role to play in revivifying Sappho as a Greek dominatrix linked with the dark areas of the Ancient World. Lafourcade tells us that Swinburne was uninterested in the bread and butter Classics: "He concentrated on "the passages from Theocritus, Callimachus, Sappho and Pindar rather than the extracts from Homer and Hesiod." He adds: "Catullus alone gave him pleasure of an ecstatic kind" (ALB 32-33). Harold Nicolson brackets together Catullus and Sappho, whom he describes as having the attraction of "forbidden fruit" (9).<sup>17</sup> We can see why. Catullus' famous rendition of Sappho's Fragment 32: "Ille mi par est" (51), forms part of his cycle of Lesbia poems, which recalled Sappho not only through the name, but represented

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<sup>15</sup> Steven Marcus sees Victorian interest in flagellation as "a kind of last-ditch compromise with and defence against homosexuality" (260). However, I think Swinburne at this stage, made no distinction between different sorts of sexuality. McGann has a detailed inconclusive discussion about the reasons for the obsession (269- 80). Rooksby comments: "The comedy was a way of controlling this anxiety and fear" (35).

<sup>16</sup> Sappho had a reputation in Antiquity as a teacher in an erotic context (Ov. *Tristia* 2:363-5 in Campbell 42-43). For further discussion of Sappho in this role see Holt N. Parker: "Sappho Schoolmistress" in Greene (RRS146-183).

<sup>17</sup> Swinburne made a lyrical association between Sappho, Catullus and Shelley: Catullus was "the most spontaneous in his godlike and bird-like melody of all lyricists known to me except Sappho and Shelley" (Lang 3: 1). His admiration was to persist throughout his life: in "The Roundel" he would address Catullus as "brother".

her in the form of the pitiless dominatrix, she is described as a “Libyan lion” or a “Scylla”.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Catullus’ Lesbia presented a further link with East Dene and with Gordon since she was the infamous Clodia, reputed to have committed incest with her brother, Clodius Pulcher. Catullus’ poem “Attis” (63), makes a more subtle connection: the poem concerns a man who castrates himself in order to serve in the mysteries of Cybele, the terrifying mother goddess, who demands not only gender-crossing but a sacrifice of masculinity itself. The poem made a great impact on Swinburne.<sup>19</sup> Some years later he wrote to Gordon:

[Tennyson’s] Boadicea is in Galliamics, a metre in which there is only one poem extant, the Atys (sic) of Catullus.... I *tried* to do my week’s verses in it once, and my tutor said it was no metre at all and he wouldn’t take them, because it was an impertinence to show such a set up, so it counted as if I had done nothing, and the consequences were tragic. (30)

She refers to yet another letter recounting the incident: “...and *then* I showed my verses indignantly (*after* the catastrophe) to another master, and he said they were very good....but that did not heal the cuts or close the scars which had imprinted on the mind and body of – [a fictitious schoolboy character with whom he identifies himself here], a just horror of strange metres” (31).

These vehement comments allow us to understand the interconnections that Swinburne was developing at Eton between Sappho and the dominatrix: through his reading of Catullus’ Lesbia poems he has come to associate Sappho with the dominatrix; now Catullus introduces him to another more terrifying form, Cybele, who like Sappho signifies “forbidden fruit”, and speaks of the unmentionable side of the Classics (see previous chapter); Swinburne tries to subject himself to her, by emulating the metre of the poem, but his perceived failure to obey the behests of this

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<sup>18</sup> “Num te leaenea montibus Libystinis / aut Scylla latrans infirma inguinum parte...procreavit...?” “Was it a lioness from Libyan mountains or a Scylla barking from her womb below that bare you?” (60)

<sup>19</sup> He was to cite the poem again in “William Blake”: “In these galliamics of Blake we see the flint of Atys whetted....” (CW16:202).

dominatrix (i.e. correctly replicate the metre), has resulted in his being beaten, and thus subjected to the discipline that he has learned to associate with the dominatrix Sappho. When the letter was later written in 1859, this association would become yet more complex, since the Sapphic figure now conflated the dominatrices, Cybele, Boadicea and Gordon herself, all three formidable whip-wielding horsewomen.

In this evolving figure of the Sapphic dominatrix we can see the operation of factors a), b) and c). She was familiar as the pain-giving nightingale of East Dene, and in her metrical effects she recalled the beating of the sea, a); she offered the sublime through her verse and the masochistic pleasure involved in learning it, b); she provided a refuge uniting Swinburne with his fellow pupils; and finally, she offered an sexual substitute in the form of Metre Mistress, c).

At Eton Sappho had come to Swinburne through the figure of the nightingale, through flagellation and the metamorphosing figure of the dominatrix. All these manifestations owe their origin to connections with actual Sapphic text, but there were other texts that would forward the process of Sapphic possession.

Gosse claims: “it is particularly important to notice that almost all Swinburne’s literary convictions were formed while he was at school” (21); while this is not altogether the case, there is some truth in it, and what is significant is, that his preferred reading related to Sappho. In his biography Swinburne, Nicolson singles out texts that the adolescent boy saw as important: “With Eton came Sophocles, Sappho, the *Birds* of Aristophanes, Catullus, the Elizabethans, Landor, Hugo, Mary Queen of Scots” (9). I do not regard this as a random selection, but as texts particularly privileged by Swinburne, knowingly or unknowingly, as representing particular aspects of Sappho. Sappho sandwiched between Sophocles, Aristophanes and Catullus acts as a signifier for the various aspects of the Ancient World: Sophocles offered a dark sublime while Aristophanes offered glimpses of that other Greece, through associations of obscenity The Birds, especially the chorus, suggests the lyrical link with the Sapphic nightingale; his interest in the Elizabethan dramatists and the privileging of heroines like Mary Queen of Scots, furthered the figure of the dominatrix. (It is possible that in the course of reading Elizabethan drama he might

have come across John Lyly's play, Sappho and Phaon). Walter Landor's Hellenics contained translations of Sappho, and Victor Hugo had introduced another form of the Sapphic dominatrix in Lucrèce Borgia. His admiration for Landor and Hugo also reveal Swinburne's need for abasement before an idol, probings after a sexual outlet that would be later transferred to Sappho.

All these texts, shouted Sappho, Sappho in factors a) and b), familiarity and the sublime. But text that he could relate to Sappho also offered factor c), a means of escape and refuge. Redesdale comments: "I can see him now sitting perched up Turk-or tailor-wise in one of the windows overlooking the yard, with some huge old world tome almost as big as himself, upon his lap..." (Gosse ACS 321).<sup>20</sup> Later Swinburne would provide himself with excuses for this need:

The half-brained creature to whom books are other than living things may see with the eyes of a bat and draw with the fingers of a mole his dullard's distinction between books and life: those who live the fuller life of the higher animal than he know that books are to poets as much part of that life as pictures are to painters, or as music is to musicians, dead matter though they may be to the spiritually still-born children of dirt and dullness who find it possible and natural to live while dead in heart and brain. Marlowe and Shakespeare, Aeschylus and *Sappho* do not for us live only on the dusty shelves of libraries. ("Dedicatory Epistle"; Hyder SR 101; emphasis added)

Text was consciously sought out as a virtual world, as an escape from the one he could not deal with, where he could forget "the bad taste or smell" of "dullards". If he had no actual friends, he would substitute books, a habit he would continue throughout his life, while his adoration of

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<sup>20</sup> Swinburne's escape into text had in fact started earlier: Gordon comments: "Algernon was always privileged to have a book at mealtimes. I do not know when the habit began. But there was always the book at tea-time especially. It was a fat Shakespeare, as far as I remember." She adds in a footnote "Lord Redesdale in his "Memories" alludes to this favourite book being taken by Algernon to school" (6). This literary cover suggests an already experienced means of escape.



their authors offered what was, in effect, a form of necrophilia leading him back towards Sappho.

Like the business of flagellation and the learning of metre, text was intimately associated with Sappho and offered factor a) a comforting familiarity; factor b) a glimpse of the sublime, and factor c) a refuge from the grim realities of Eton life, and if it contained the figure of the sublime dominatrix, it would also provide the necessary sexual substitute. Nicolson refers to the influence of Sappho at Eton which he dismisses irritably “as this insatiate Sappho worship” (167). He adds:

It is probable that some Sapphic fragment assumed for him a purely adventitious importance when at Eton, and from that small seed grew the quite disproportionate forest of enthusiasm which choked the growth of other and more important influences. (167)

However, in this section we have seen that the advance of Sappho’s possessive influence grew not from one small seed, but from a number of large ones, and that for Swinburne there could be no “other or more important influences” than Sappho and associated text; this “forest” would become a burgeoning enthusiasm in its Greek sense, a source of divine inspiration. Indeed, Nicolson’s use of the word “seed” is more telling than he intended, since the Sapphic seeds would be the very source of Swinburne’s fertility.

I have spent some time discussing the influence of Sappho at Eton since it was there that Swinburne’s earlier unconscious reception of her was realized, enhanced and developed. At Eton Swinburne waited, as Gosse remarks, for Sappho to take “possession of his soul” (25).

### **Sappho in the outside world**

After leaving Eton, it was time for Swinburne to move on into real life and develop his own male identity, no easy task for the young mid- Victorian male, as Sussman explains:

...there was no longer a single homogenous ideal of male identity, no longer one, but a number of competing constructions of manliness to choose among. In a society of increasing class mobility, one no longer simply adopted the masculine style of one's father. And there was no single public ritual marking the passage to manhood.  
(46)

For Swinburne with his sexual immaturity, it would be very difficult indeed, to develop a male identity, moreover Sappho was no longer present in her familiar form to act as a refuge. However, in a curious incident, after leaving school, we see him desperately endeavouring to continue the much-needed association. Gordon refers to a letter in which he recounts the incident in the third person:

After leaving Eton near the end of his seventeenth year he wanted to go into the army. Didn't he, poor chap! The Balaklava Charge eclipsed all other visions.<sup>21</sup> To be prepared for such a chance as that, instead of being prepared for Oxford, was the one dream of his life. I am sure you won't deride it because he was but a little, slightly built chap. (13-17)

As at Eton, it was obvious that this "little slightly-built chap" would again not be one of the boys; and as he had then sought a proof of manliness in talking of the Sappho-associated flogging, now a new "masculine" venture would be associated with Sappho. His alternative proof of manliness would be furnished by scaling Culver Cliff: "a chance of testing my nerve in face of death..." (Gordon 13). He recounts the venture:

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<sup>21</sup> Because Swinburne's responses were so often filtered through text, this idea might well have been the result of reading Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade". I also suggest another tenuous, but enticing possibility: could Swinburne have come across Fanny Duberly's recently published *Journal* (1855) which recounted her experiences as the wife of the paymaster of the 8<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Hussars? She was certainly a remarkable blueprint for the dominatrix: "quietly looking through her Lorgnette, at the whole of her regiment being blown to pieces at the dreadful Balaclava affair.....a lover of hers being one of the first killed" (Mark Bostridge "Women at War").

As I got near the top, I remember thinking I should not like to climb down again. In a minute or two more I found that I must, as the top part or *top story* of the precipice came jutting out aslant above me for some feet. Even a real seagull could not have worked his way up I felt I must not stop to think for one second.... I felt like setting my teeth and swearing I would not come down again alive – if I did return to the foot of the cliff again it should be in a fragmentary condition. I knew it would be almost certain death to look down. (Gordon 14-15)

In this attempt Swinburne was either consciously or unconsciously, seeking Sappho. In discussing the incident, Prins draws attention to what I have termed factors a, b and c: “This fantasy of self-fragmentation serves to identify Swinburne with the figure of Sappho [factor a] and the legacy of her leap becomes his own” (165).<sup>22</sup> She adds, “Swinburne’s ascent to the top part of the precipice is clearly a Sublime narrative (or “top story”) dramatizing his aspiration to Longinian heights...” She continues: “the episode on Culver cliff following a sublime trajectory that seems inevitable to Swinburne; ascending to sublime heights in order to dash himself on the rocks, plummeting into the sea and dissolving into unconsciousness” (165). Here we see factors b) and c) operating, since this is not only a Longinean, but a Burkean sublime, the pleasurable contemplation of horror is only a “*fantasy* of self-fragmentation”, and it is enjoyed from a position of safety, the familiar ambience of East Dene. Performing his own version of Sappho’s leap, making his way *upwards* instead of plunging downward, had, it seems, provided Swinburne with a much needed alternative proof of virility; it was a form of erection that owed its origin to Sappho.

Nor does the incident finish there. I regard Swinburne’s description of the outcome of the incident as another instance of a Sapphic intervention, one which provides a further complex instance of Swinburne’s desire to submit to a female principle with Sapphic associations, not

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<sup>22</sup> The bird reference offers another instance of factor a); in the account he continues to identify himself fraternally with these birds, as he had with the nightingale: in the course of his climb he sees “a perfect flock of the others who had evidently never seen a wingless brother so near the family quarters before” (15).

this time to the dominatrix, but to the mother, both the Earth Mother and the Birth Mother. He concludes his narrative:

“this [foothold] enabled me to get breath and *to crawl* at full speed, (so to say) up the remaining bit of cliff. At the top I *had not strength* enough left to turn or stir; I *lay* on my right side *helpless*, and just had time to think what a sell, (and what an inevitable one it would be) if I were to roll back over the edge after all, *when I became unconscious.*” (14-15; emphasis added)

I see the italicised words expressing a desire by the inadequate male to return to an infantile state, to take refuge with the female principle in the form of the Earth Mother by crawling to her, lying on her and sleeping with her, a desire which Swinburne had already sought to have satisfied in his submission to the Sapphic dominatrix. He concludes the incident by describing his return to another maternal presence, his Birth Mother who again provides comfort and reassurance: “...she laughed a short sweet laugh most satisfactory to the young ear, and said, ‘nobody ever thought you were a coward, my boy’”(17). In “Thalassius” (1880), Swinburne’s autobiographical poem, the boy’s mother, the sea nymph, Cymothoe will replicate Lady Swinburne’s actions: instead of smiling at her returning naughty son from the drawing room sofa at East Dene, she “looked laughing toward him from her midsea throne”; the sea nymph receives the boy both as actual human mother and as the maternal presence of the sea itself. In his mother’s arms the infant Thalassius is described as “a babe asleep with flower-soft face that gleamed”, but this description draws directly from Sappho’s description of *her* daughter: “a beautiful child who looks like golden flowers” (Fragment 132). In the comforting figure of the mother Swinburne I recognizes the presence of Sappho, factors a) and c). I regard the whole Culver Cliff incident, the climb *and* the return home as a multiple Sapphic experience that exhibits the familiar pull of factors a, b and c, and constitutes a further, dramatic stage in the process of possession, a need to submit to a female principle whether mother or dominatrix, both of whom are signified by Sappho.

If Swinburne hoped to rediscover “la mère de jeux latins et voluptés grecques”, whom he had met in his early encounters with Gordon, and in Sappho’s metric discipline at Eton, by studying Greats at Oxford, he was to be disappointed. Two figures who might have been expected to show him the glittering other, failed to do so. Gosse describes Swinburne’s disappointment in the lectures of Matthew Arnold whose “Empedocles on Etna” he had greatly admired while at Eton (52-3). Jowett, too, a figure whose reforming schemes for the Classics (described by Linda Dowling in Victorian Hellenism 64), might have been expected to interest him, and who was to prove a mentor in his later life, failed to excite any interest in him for subject. This barrenness, this lack of any sort of Sapphic sublime (factor b) can be seen, I think, reflected in “The Temple of Janus”, written for the Newdigate Prize in 1857. Georges Lafourcade devotes a chapter to this work and shows how Swinburne uses the poem in a vain attempt to find a poetic voice by imitating Dryden, Shelley, Wordsworth and Keats. However, he is forced to conclude:

*The Temple of Janus* n’est pas un grand poème; il lui manque l’unité et la sincérité de l’ inspiration. Malgré les très bons intentions du poète, l’indépendance italienne demeure pour lui quelques chose de trop abstrait et, malgré un enthousiasme violent pour l’idée de liberté, ses vers ne sont trop souvent qu’un cours d’histoire romaine versifiée.... (LJ 2:27) <sup>23</sup>

I think the telling phrase is “il lui manque l’unité et la sincérité de l’ inspiration”: there was no breath of Sappho. Lafourcade concludes: “Most of Swinburne’s poetic works from 1858 to 1860 are a long self-imposed poetic grind” (ALB 70-71). He needed to seek further for the source of lyrical inspiration, and as always, he looked to emulation of admired text as the way to capture and enact the poetic impulse.

Lafourcade devotes Chapters 1-10 in his second volume of La Jeunesse de Swinburne to an examination of Swinburne’s reading matter, and he tries to trace from it the different sources of

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<sup>23</sup> “The Temple of Venus” is not a great poem; it lacks unity and sincerity of inspiration. In spite of the poet’s good intentions Italian Independence offered him something too abstract, and in spite of his passionate interest in the idea of liberty, his verses are too often nothing but a form of versified Roman History.”

inspiration that he sees Swinburne attempting to utilize, considerably extending Nicolson's Eton list. Lafourcade's work is detailed and exhaustive, (if not to say exhausting) in its unending quest to nail down every conceivable source.<sup>24</sup> Obviously, it would be impossible (and unnecessary) to retrace Lafourcade's implacable footsteps, but such detailed work is useful in allowing us to see to what extent Swinburne utilized his reading for imitation and emulation, right from his early "Gloriana", written in the style of Dryden at Eton for the visit of Queen Victoria, up to his emulation of his contemporaries, Tennyson, Arnold and Browning, and producing, as Lafourcade puts it, "une satire de l'inspiration de la poésie victorienne tout entière" (LJ2:163).<sup>25</sup>

In the 1859 poem "The Nightingale" we can see Swinburne looking at all available sources to find inspiration – to find Sappho, to recapture his early intimations of her, with its added Eton associations, and celebrate her in the form that he had first met her. Speaking of this association, Maxwell writes: "the poem weaves together the dominant characteristics of the bird inherited from the poetic tradition, but sees them epitomized in the figure of Sappho, whose song is offered as corollary", and she demonstrates the influence of Keats, Coleridge and Arnold, Tennyson, and particularly that of Shelley in achieving this end (44-5).

The poem recalls Swinburne's early intimations of Sappho in the song of the nightingale; for example, he speaks of "thick throbbings", "sweet passion" and "burning song", thereby drawing from Keatsean sensuality to pinpoint the *ποθος* that he experienced as a child, before identifying the song with Sappho. The nightingale is then associated with the poet of "Leucadia's rock", just

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<sup>24</sup> The following title headings shows the huge diversity of sources of attempted emulation: Chapter 1: Le style classique: The Triumph of Gloriana 1851 (11-15); Chapter 2: Les poèmes politiques et l'influence de Shelley 1856-1860 (16-36); Chapter 3: Poèmes préraphaélites 1857-1862 (37-72); Chapter 4: Conteurs et chroniqueurs français et italiens: Le Triameron (1858 – 1861) (73-93); Chapter 5: Dante and Villon (1858 – 1863) (94-104); Chapter 6: La Bible. Les Sonnets de Shakespeare (105-113); Chapter 7: Les Tragedies élisabéthaines (114-1); Chapter 8: Les Ballades du Border (1859-1863); Chapter 9: Imitation de Modernes: Browning et Tennyson (156-161); Chapter 10: La tendance parodique: Les spasmodistes et Coventry Patmore (162-172). In the second part of the book Chapter 3 is devoted to the Classical Sources of *Atalanta in Calydon*, Chapter 4 to tracing the sources of *Poems and Ballads*:1 from his reading (424-464).

<sup>25</sup> "A satire of the inspiration for Victorian poetry as a whole."

as he himself had made the association at Eton. But it is through his imitation of Shelley whom he had long associated with Sappho, that he comes closest to Sappho.<sup>26</sup> Shelley's "Our sincerest laughter with some pain is fraught" ("Ode to a Skylark") becomes the impetus for an echoing of Sapphic tropes. Now Sappho's juxtaposed tropes of pain and joy are constantly echoed in an orgy of outpouring: "sorrow... full of joy," "joy like her sister sorrow", and the expression "fiery sweetness" mimics Sappho's description of eros as "bitter-sweet"(Fragment 130), and affirms Swinburne's own association between the two in his Eton experience, both in reading her verse and experiencing flagellation. Finally, Swinburne celebrates a very Greek Sappho, whose dark Dionysian roots lie beneath the "Thracian forests" and recall the Catullan "Attis". It was in the context of this poem that Lafourcade was to comment: "he found in the Sapphic fragments and tradition a kind of burning unsatisfied inspiration which he felt as strongly akin to his own" (Swinburne's 'Hyperion' and Other Poems 149).

This early poem shows Swinburne using emulation to register and celebrate the constructs of Sappho that have become important to him, and it marks an important stage in his Sapphic possession as he acknowledges factors a, b and c: the commonality of early childhood experience; her glittering otherness as signifier of Aberrance and Sublimity; and his seeking of a refuge with her, through turning her song into his own, and finally, an indulgence in cerebral eroticism. It is a statement of his growing closeness to her, the beginning of finding the Sapphic Muse and rejoicing in his possession by her. And yet the poem is little more than a pastiche, even Sappho's "burning song" derives from Byron's "burning Sappho." Emulation could only take him so far. Swinburne needed to discover other constructs of Sappho.

### **Sappho embodied**

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<sup>26</sup> Since Eton Swinburne had associated Shelley with Sappho and Catullus (see footnote 33). That he made further links can be seen in his comments on Shelley's verses on the death of his son, which he describes as "scraps of heaven and shreds of paradise"; he continues: "...they vex and delight us no less than do the shattered fragments of Aeschylus and of Pindar, of Simonides and of Sappho, and in the relics of Shelley there is something to remind us alternately of all these transcendent names" (CW 15: 337). The words "shattered fragments" and "scraps of heaven and shreds of paradise" might be equally applied to Sappho's own fragments, while the words "vex and delight" recall the masochistic pleasure afforded by Sappho's verses which "strike and sting" (Notes, Hyder SR 21).

On 21<sup>st</sup> November 1859 Swinburne left Oxford for good, never having taken a degree. Sappho had not materialized, as might have been expected, in her Classical persona in the course of Swinburne's studies. However, she had appeared in two other significant forms: a) through French Sapphic literature and b) through his friendship with the Pre-Raphaelites. Both encounters would be interconnected and both would offer embodiments of Sappho.

Between 1859 and 1860 Swinburne read Théophile Gautier's Mademoiselle de Maupin, a book which he was later to eulogise in his "Sonnet (with a copy of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*)", and to describe as "the golden book of spirit and sense". In the aberrance of its heroine he saw the tropes of lesbianism, cross-dressing and the dominatrix that he now associated with Sappho, fleshed out and presented in a contemporary context.<sup>27</sup> He immersed himself in Balzac.

Randolph Hughes states: "I have drawn up a list of the French books borrowed by him from the library of the Taylor Institution between March 1859 and May 1860.....it includes over forty of Balzac's works" (403). He comments on the particular attractions of La Fille aux Yeux d'Or for Swinburne, all of which had Sapphic associations: "interest in illegitimacy, offspring of the same fathers by different women, Sapphism, the call of the blood.....the desire of Paquita to see de Marsay dressed as a woman"( 408). In Sexual Personae Camille Paglia comments on the interconnection between Balzac's heroine and the Sapphic dominatrix: "Swinburne's Sappho like the Lesbian marquise of Balzac's The Girl with the Golden Eyes is a female hierarch: he revives Sappho *in propria persona* in order to be crushed again beneath female superiority" (474). Balzac also echoed the earlier novels of Henri de Latouche, particularly Fragoletta with its hermaphrodite hero/heroine recalling the "mascula" Sappho of Antiquity.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The cross-dressing bisexual heroine Theodore- Madeleine, acting as squire to d'Albert might well have become conflated with the fearless horsewoman Gordon. In his "Memorial Verses" Swinburne refers to the novel and pinpoints specific Sapphic aspects: "Veiled loves", "flowers double blossomed", "shifted shapes" and "fruits of scent and hue / Sweet as the bride bed, stranger than the grave", all suggest sexual aberrance and Sapphic lability.

<sup>28</sup> Swinburne was enthusiastically to describe Fragoletta in Les Abîmes as "that singular, incoherent, admirable novel, so various and vigorous in manner of work; full of southern heat and coloured with Italian air, and light to the last page of it" (Quoted in Hughes 399).



With their interest in cross-dressing, Lesbianism, incest, the dominatrix, sadomasochism and aberrance, these novels offered vivid labile metamorphosing forms of Sappho in which Swinburne could glimpse the glittering other (factor b), and utilise as a sexual other in his own private fantasies (factor c). They also were reminders of his own East Dene childhood (factor a).<sup>29</sup> He would continue to broaden his association with the French Sapphic dominatrix: in 1863 he read Flaubert's Salammbô, which recreated for him not only the horror in the sublime: "...the tortures, battles, massacres and Moloch-sacrifices are stunning" (Lang: 1: 76 -77), but in the person of the snake-loving heroine, a new signifier of the dominatrix. These French authors provided embodiments of a Sapphic presence which had been lacking in the study of Greats, and they were the precursor to a wider field of Sappho-related texts whose authors would include Baudelaire and Sade.

Sappho was also to be sighted through the work of the Pre-Raphaelites who would in their various ways, provide embodiments of Sapphic constructs, in particular that of the dominatrix, and in so doing, offer Swinburne specific visual images which he could associate with Sappho herself. Indeed Rossetti's erotic Lilith was to add another layer to Sapphic embodiment in French literature, since Swinburne was to identify the sexual icon with Mademoiselle de Maupin (CW 15:212). Swinburne had met William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who had been commissioned to paint frescoes on the walls and ceiling of the Oxford Union Debating Hall, in 1857. Their chosen subject was the Legends of King Arthur and while the frescoes no longer remain, Morris' Queen Guinevere (1858) which had acted as an inspiration to Rossetti in the mural, presents a vivid example of a dominatrix (Parris 169). Burne-Jones and Rossetti would provide a further variety of embodiments of the type as can be seen in Rossetti's Lucrezia Borgia (1860-1), his "Clara von Bork" (1861) and Burne-Jones' Sidonia von Bork (1860). On these last two Stephen Wildman comments: "they are effectively

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<sup>29</sup> Swinburne's two novels would reflect his own experience of country house life (Rooksby 99) and Lafourcade (LJI: 9), but they also drew from Balzac; Swinburne would describe Lesbia Brandon "as a sort of étude à la Balzac"(Lang 1: 224).

twin expressions of the same idea” (65).<sup>30</sup> Their influence can be seen in Swinburne’s unpublished and unpublishable Chronicle of Tebaldeo Tebaldei, a monograph in the praise of Lucrezia Borgia. Swinburne was fascinated by the medievalism of the PreRaphaelites, and there was an outpouring of verse plays drawing from it: in 1857 came the play Rosamund influenced by the paintings Rossetti and Burne-Jones featuring Henry 11’s beloved.<sup>31</sup> The Queen Mother followed, and when he should have been revising for Greats in 1859, Swinburne busied himself instead, in writing Laugh and Lie Down. In these works we can see Swinburne’s trying to realize the masochistic sublime through Sappho.<sup>32</sup> The plays contain familiar Sapphic associations: the figures of the dominatrix, trans-gendering, flagellation, and the pain/pleasure motif. But in spite of the plethora of Sapphic tropes, there was not enough of Sappho-the-muse about them to give the plays life: the reviewer of the “Athenaeum” comments: “we should have conceived it hardly possible to make the crimes of Catherine de Medici dull, howsoever they were presented. Mr Swinburne however, has done so” (“To toil through ‘The Queen Mother’” Hyder TCH 2). Again, his emulation of the medieval verse of Rossetti and Morris remained just that: emulation.

While Rossetti and Burne-Jones introduced the delineated outline of dominatrices who might be accommodated to enrich his idea of Sappho, Simeon Solomon, in his Study of Sappho (1862), was to offer a vivid image of an actual Sappho who was androgynous in appearance. Solomon’s

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<sup>30</sup> For other examples of their dominatrices see Alistair Grieve “Rossetti and the Scandal of Art for Art’s Sake” (Prettejohn After the PreRaphaelites (20-21).

<sup>31</sup> Rossetti’s Fair Rosamund (1861) and Burne-Jones’s Fair Rosamond (1861) undoubtedly provided the inspiration for the metamorphosing figure of the Sapphic dominatrix. Henderson comments that Rosamund in Swinburne’s play “appears clearly as one of Rossetti’s women.” He adds “her beauty is, needless to say, a tormenting beauty” (50). The eponymous heroine declares: “I, Helen holding Paris by the lips, / Smote Hector through the head; I, Cressida / So kissed men’s mouths that they went sick or mad, / Stung right at brain with me....”

<sup>32</sup> For example, The Queen Mother is concerned with the St. Bartholomew’s Day’s Massacre; Laugh and Lie Down bursts with Sapphic constructs as can be seen from Jean Overton-Fuller’s paraphrase of the plot:

Frank presents his younger brother, Frederick, to Imperia, telling her Frederick is a girl dressed as a boy. Imperia, believing this to be true, or else that Frederick is a hermaphrodite, tells him to dress as a girl, but later makes them change clothes. They do. Now it is Frank who is dressed as a girl. Another of Imperia’s suitors embraces him and he plays up marvellously to the role he has been given...the heroine has the page whipped to death. (51)

copious depictions of androgynous figures, along with his own homosexuality suggested the idea of sexual lability, something with which Swinburne, in “his slenderness and slightness” and “kind of fairy look”(Gosse 284), might associate both with “mascula” Sappho and with himself (factor a). Later Solomon would offer other depictions: Sappho and Erinna in a Garden at Mytilene (1864), and Erinna taken from Sappho (1865), which offered distinct images of a Sappho who was both Lesbian and lesbian, and who privileged a signifier of the aberrant in the Greek.

### **Sappho and the problems of poetic identity**

Although his father had (unwillingly) financed the publishing of Rosamund and The Queen Mother in 1860, Swinburne’s literary forays had not been successful (LJ 1: 98). Lafourcade comments:

...durant la période 1857-1860, la pensée de Swinburne est en état de désavantage; à peine formée, insuffisamment développée, elle est voilée, étouffée par maintes considérations d’un autre ordre et est nettement éclipsée par la réussite et l’originalité constante de la forme. (LJ: 2:187)<sup>33</sup>

Ian Fletcher makes the same point:

Swinburne discovered his poetic identity through the distinction between personality and ‘self’ trapped within personality, in his case an absurd body, without access to women. His solution was to transmute concrete being into artifice by imitation, parody and caricature. In other words he tried to release identity by remoulding the styles of the past into an integrity that was of the surface only and to achieve selfhood with the aid of tradition. (52)

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<sup>33</sup> “During the period 1857-1860, Swinburne’s thinking is disadvantaged, hardly formed, insufficiently developed, it is veiled, stifled by many constraints of another kind (of verse), and is totally eclipsed by the success and the unchanging nature of the original form.”

Although Fletcher mistakenly uses these comments to describe Swinburne's work as whole, I think they accurately pinpoint the root of the problem at this time: the lacuna between Swinburne's emotional and sexual development and his poetic potential. In the wish-fulfillment of his autobiographical poem "Thalassius", Swinburne describes the success of his doppelgänger:

...the spirit in him, when the winds grew strong  
Grew great with child of song...  
Now too the soul of all his senses felt  
The passionate pride of deep sea-pulses dealt  
Through nerve and jubilant vein... (461-467)

We can see that Thalassius' "passionate pride" was the state desired by Swinburne. However, Swinburne was not Thalassius. He lacked what Patricia Ball describes as "a deep acceptance of all experience and a full entry into it [which] will lead to the climax of egocentric realization" (11). He might grow "great with child of song", but his was a phantom pregnancy since the sexual input was missing; he could not deliver the baby, however much he laboured to do so. In his essay on Byron and Shelley he claims:

They feed upon nature with a holy hunger, follow her with a divine lust as of gods chasing the daughters of men. Wind and fire, the cadence of thunder and the clamours of the sea, gave to them no less of sensual pleasure than of spiritual sustenance. These things they desired as others desire music or wine or the beauty of women....To them the large motions and the remote beauties of space were tangible and familiar as flowers. (CW 15: 126-127)

Now he, Swinburne, had also fed upon nature, felt the clamours of the sea upon his body, and he too, had observed the "remote beauties of space", as he gazed from the cliff tops around East Dene, but in trying to capture them in verse he had not been "as a god chasing after the

daughters of men”. His verses, as Sir George Young was to comment, “flowed, but they did not sing” (Lafourcade LJ: 1: 98). He might claim that Romantic poets were somehow above sexual intercourse, but a cursory glance at the lives of Byron and Shelley would show all too clearly that they, no less than other male poets, and indeed, patently more than most, had actually enjoyed “the beauty of women”, and that their verse had taken inspiration from this enjoyment. But unlike the fortunate Thalassius with a string of sexual conquests behind him, Swinburne was “trapped in an absurd body, without access to women”<sup>34</sup> How then could he achieve a sexual identity that would allow him to discover and experience this “fierce and blind desire”, this necessary source of inspiration which would underpin the verse and allow him to become a virile poet? How could the poet’s “divine lust” be satisfied? How could he, with his glaring sexual deficiencies, forge a male identity that would enable him to become, “as a god chasing after the daughters of men”?

The world of masculinity first encountered at Eton, had now widened into a terrifyingly large arena: Sussman points out just how problematic the forging of a male identity was for the mid-Victorian male, and he identifies a multiplicity of varying exemplars of manhood: the industrial, the working class, the aggressive middle-class, the Christian middle-class man, the patrician, the artisan, the entrepreneur, the gentleman, the prophet-sage, the professional man, and the bohemian (13-14). How was Swinburne, with his glaring sexual deficiencies, to position himself, both as man and poet amidst these bewildering alternatives in a world of diverse aggressively successful role models of the virile male? Earlier we saw him trying to prove his virility at Eton with his “authoritative” conversation about flagellation, and later in his ascent of Culver Cliff, and we saw how each time he had come to Sappho as a substitute (factor c); Oxford had not presented such a threat and had offered the consolations of Sappho through

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<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Maupassant’s description as recorded by the Goncourt brothers:

...thin and startling at first glance – a sort of fantastic apparition...His forehead was very high under his long hair, and his face became gradually narrower towards a slight chin shadowed by a meagre tuft of beard. A very light moustache hovered over remarkably thin, tight lips, and his neck, which seemed to have no end, joined that head – alive with clear, fixed, penetrating eyes to a torso without shoulders, the top of his chest seeming hardly wider than his forehead. This virtually supernatural creature was shaken all over by nervous spasms. (Hyder TCH 185-187)

visual image and literature, and indeed he had celebrated her through the voice of the Romantics, but now he was once again thrown into a masculine world where men spoke for themselves and engaged in actual, not virtual sexual congress, and it was a world in which he needed to position himself, if he was to satisfy “the divine lust”. Once again he would need the help of Sappho.

The world of masculinity was perhaps epitomized in the figure of Richard Monckton-Milnes (later Lord Houghton), under whose influence Swinburne fell in May 1861. He was a politician, a patron of the Arts, a literary critic, a man with an intimate knowledge of Europe, a wealthy man, and a roué; as Lafourcade says, “il connait tout le monde et tout le monde le connait” (177).<sup>35</sup> And with a library full of pornography at his country house Fryston, he was a living signifier of and host to, the world of masculinity. Through his patronage Swinburne would encounter other male role models – alive and dead. For example, it was at Fryston in 1861 that he met Charles Kingsley who celebrated “all by which man is brought in contact with this earth – the beauties of sex, of strength, of activity....” (Sacred and Legendary Art 217), and Thomas Carlyle whose Hero as Man of Letters had associated artistic creativity with specifically male energy.<sup>36</sup> How could Swinburne emulate such paragons of virile creativity and write verse, let alone erotic verse, while patently failing to be a *heroic* man of letters? Sussman writes: “For Browning, as for Carlyle and the PreRaphaelites, the central issue within masculinity is the management of male energy” (73). Swinburne’s position was different: it was not the management of male energy that was the problem, but the getting of it in the first place, to manage. As always, it wasn’t to actual experience but to text, that Swinburne turned.

Swinburne had been long drawn to de Sade and had already written Charenton, An Imaginative Portrait, when in 1861 Houghton lent him a copy of Justine. The initial attraction of de Sade

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<sup>35</sup> “He knew all the world and all the world knew him.”

<sup>36</sup> In his youth Swinburne was a great admirer of both, for example he writes: “Have you seen Kingsley’s *Two Years Ago*? I admire it almost as much as *Westward Ho* if not quite: it shows at least no falling off in power, tho’ I think he’s rather hard on that unlucky poet” (Letter to John Nichol 1857: Lang 1:10). He came to admire Carlyle through his Oxford friendship with John Nichol who was “full of ardour for Carlyle” (Henderson 36).

was, I think, owing to his representation of a kind of skewed sexuality, an alternative sublime that he (Swinburne) might privilege over normal sexuality, thereby proving himself not an outsider in the sexual field, but instead, a sophisticated connoisseur. There are remarkable parallels between Swinburne's attitude to flogging at Eton and to de Sade in later life: both represented the glittering other, and both represented substitute forms of sexuality. Indeed, talking about de Sade was like talking about flogging, a wink to the knowing, a way of being one of the boys, but as with flogging, these associations were unsatisfactory ways of asserting masculinity; perhaps he sensed that his fellow readers did not regard de Sade as a glorious substitute sexual icon, but as either distasteful or ridiculous, so he tried to assert his own normality by treating him with ridicule as a joke: "I really thought I must have died or split open or choked with laughing" (Lang 54); but in fact, de Sade was anything but a joke, Swinburne was to obsessively refer to this signifier of unattainable sexuality by letter and in conversation for the rest of his life. The Marquis was, in effect, shadow of Sappho, a poor substitute. For example, in making reference to M. Roland whose penchant was for the death-dicing sexual game of "coupe-corde", Swinburne goes on to regret that the marquis, "n'ait pas imaginé les supplices de mer" (Lang 1: 66). While he provided glimpses of the glittering other, he could not offer the manifold attractions of the Sappho-associated sea nor the familiarity of the Eton metre Mistress; he could only be appreciated as part of an amalgam of Sapphic constructs that Swinburne had always sought after in his "craving (ultra Sapphic and plusquam Sadic) lust after the sea" (Lang 1: 305). In a letter dated 29<sup>th</sup> July 1869, describing Houghton's library he makes, perhaps an unconscious, association between de Sade and Sappho: "There is every edition of every work of our dear and honoured marquis... There is a Sapphic group by Pradier...." Sade could only be imagined, Sappho could be embodied.

Houghton had a penchant for introducing unlikely bedfellows, and in 1861 he introduced Swinburne to Richard Burton. Lafourcade shrewdly remarks that Burton was for Swinburne "un géant élisabéthain, sorti d'un pièce de Shakespeare, c'est Drake et c'est "Frobisher, c'est Othello et Tamburlaine" (LJ1:189)." <sup>37</sup> Swinburne praises "his marvelous and unequalled powers and

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<sup>37</sup> Burton had spent seven years in India as an army officer, (where he had conducted a survey of homosexual brothels in Karachi), he had been consul at Ferdinando-Po; he was a polyglot who had translated The Arabian

qualities as soldier, scholar, thinker, ruler, leader....” (Lang 2: 336). Not only did Burton have associations of the sublime that Swinburne had looked for in the Elizabethan dramatists, he was Landor, Hugo and Mazzini, the old idols from Eton all rolled into one example of the glittering other, *and* he emanated an aura of male sexuality. Lafourcade comments: “sa virilité hypnotisait le poète” (189). Perhaps in his drinking exploits and visits to the Cannibal Club in the company of Burton, Swinburne hoped to gain a little reflected masculinity, but he could not keep up with him, and one senses his relief when Burton took himself off: “As my tempter and favourite audience has gone to Santos, I may hope to be a good boy again” (Lang 1: 240). He adds sadly, “the captain was too many for me.”<sup>38</sup> This male idol had provided him with no injection of masculinity, but had left him with a sense of inferiority, and while his dynamic presence had provided factor b), he had not provided factor a), the comforting familiarity afforded by Sappho. However, I suggest that he did provide a pointer towards, even an exemplum of, the desirability of Sapphic possession. In 1853 Burton had disguised himself as a pilgrim visiting Mecca; Dane Kennedy comments:

Though biographers have generally taken his effort to pass as a Muslim pilgrim at face value, accepting his explanation that it was necessary to gain entrée to a world that he could not otherwise come to know so intimately, other scholars, particularly specialists in literature and literary theory, have evaluated his adventure in very different terms, raising intriguing questions about its implication for self-representation and identity. ... There is little doubt that Burton too was attracted to impersonation precisely because it presented a way of transgressing against the codes and conventions that governed society, challenging the psychic shackles imposed by society. (92)

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Nights, a man who had been to Mecca disguised as a Muslim; he had discovered the sources of the Nile, and he was an advocate of polygamy. The part of The Perfumed Garden that was destroyed by Lady Burton after her husband’s death, dealt amongst other things with the origins of lesbianism and the proclivities of sodomites.

<sup>38</sup> I think it extremely unlikely that the impotent Swinburne engaged in any form of homosexual activity with Burton, any more than he had with Simeon Solomon; Fawn Brodie in her book, The Devil Drives, claims that “on at least one occasion, something more than drinking was involved” (247). But how does she *know*? There is no evidence that the two indulged in genital activity. What seems more likely is that Burton *talked* about the subject and privileged male sexuality.



Burton's oriental disguise had given him an entrée into a closed world and offered an enticing exemplum of the benefits of losing the self in the admired other, and by so doing achieve one's own male identity. If he, Swinburne too, could lose himself in his own source of inspiration, as his friend and idol Burton had, might this not compensate for a lack of sexual identity, and might it not also allow him to speak of that which might not be spoken? Moreover, if possessed by his Eastern persona, Burton could abase himself at Mecca, could not he, Swinburne, also become an acolyte at his own Mecca, the glittering other (factor b), and abase himself at Sappho's "broken altar", and be lost within the divinity of "the greatest poet who ever was at all"?

In 1863, however, events took a new turn and it looked as if Swinburne's problems might be solved, and after all, Sappho would become redundant and he would become as other creative artists were: like Carlyle, Kingsley or Browning, like Burne-Jones, Morris, and Rossetti, he too would possess a living muse, one who was both the beloved of the artist, and the source of artistic inspiration. Or so it seemed. For a muse was to appear or rather re-appear on his own familiar Helicon, in the now form of the adult, very alive person of the adult Gordon. Here she herself describes the situation:

His own family was abroad and he stayed, I think from October to February [1863]. At that time he was engaged in writing "Atalanta in Calydon" – his first great play on the model of the Greek drama. It was begun when he came to us, but the first time I heard the opening chorus, "When the hounds of Spring are on the Winter's traces," was on horseback, and I know to this day the exact strip of road between Newport and Shorwell where he repeated it to me.

All at once the Sapphic constructs associated with Gordon became re-vivified: dominatrix, gender-crosser, the aberrant and the Greek. Here was the living reincarnation of Sappho, no longer the immature nymphette of "Hide and Seek", but a fully eroticised woman ready to perform as a living muse. Ecstatically Swinburne declared:

My greatest pleasure just now is when M ...[Gordon] practises Handel on the organ; but I can hardly *behave* for delight at some of the choruses. I care hardly more than I ever did for any minor music; but *that* is an enjoyment which wants special language to describe it, being so unlike all others. It crams and crowds me with old and new verses, half-remembered and half-made, which new ones will hardly come straight afterwards; but under their influence I have done some more of my *Atalanta*.

(Gordon 61)

Gordon is the muse whose presence both excites him sexually and inspires him to write: “I can hardly *behave* for delight”, (the italics are Swinburne’s, intended, no doubt, to imply sexual arousal), and indeed this physical state identifies him with Sappho’s own: “For when I look at you for a moment,.... a trembling seizes me all over, I am greener than grass and it seems to me that I am little short of dying” (Fragment 32). He shares in her erotic sublime, factors a) and b). In Gordon he has discovered the perfect Sapphic muse who is a conflation of the sexualized woman and the source of inspiration; as the presence of an actual muse unfolded before him, it must have seemed that problems of masculinity and personality were behind him.

At Gordon’s side he embarked on what was to be his most successful work: *Atalanta in Calydon*. The play may well have been begun as a tribute to Swinburne’s favourite sister Edith who had died in the Summer of 1863, but this “maiden-rose”, “snowy-souled ” Atalantan muse fades away as the influence of Gordon made itself felt, and the virginal heroine ceded her place to the dominatrix figure of Athaea, as she premeditates the death of her son. *Atalanta* composed under the influence of Gordon’s muse-like presence, indicates different constructs of Sappho: her Greekness, her cross-dressing, her aberrance, her construct of the dominatrix, and her role as signifier of a terrifying sublime.<sup>39</sup> But Sappho had become embodied in the living person of Mary Gordon who provided factors a, b and c: a) identification because Mary was a

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<sup>39</sup> The play is also resonant with tropes of incest: Isobel Armstrong in her chapter “Swinburne, Agnostic Republican” sees Althaea’s love as incestuous, and the play as “poetry of desire”, “consuming exhausting desire” (*Victorian Poetry* 418).

familiar family presence, a virtual sister; b) the glittering other who represented glittering sexuality and a source of inspiration, a glimpse of the sublime: “I can hardly *behave* for delight”; c) a presence in whom he might take refuge as he sat comfortably at her side, and was enabled to compose. Gordon tells us: “In our library often alone with my mother and myself, much of the work was written out, and the table would be strewn with the big sheets of the manuscript” (19). At the same time as writing Atalanta in Calydon Swinburne was helping Gordon write a flagellation novel, Children of the Chapel, and the shared act of writing on this Sapphic subject, offered an alternative form of sexual gratification, as well as the possibility of a real sexual relationship in the form of marriage. Gordon had apparently replaced Sappho – rendered her redundant.

However, at end of 1864 Gordon became engaged, and in June 1865 she was married – but not to Swinburne. Gordon’s chosen mate, Colonel Disney-Leith, was a man who had seen action in the savage Sikh war of 1848, and thus cruelly epitomised the very manliness which Swinburne had been denied when *he* failed to join the cavalry; and Gordon’s privileging of this exemplum of virility, would have finally brought home to Swinburne his own insufficient masculinity. He must have thought of Colonel Disney-Leith as Sappho felt about her supplanter in Fragment 1: “He seems fortunate as the gods to me, the man who sits opposite you and listens to your sweet voice and lovely laughter.” Once when he had sat by Gordon in the library at Niton, he too had been such a fortunate man, but now, “the sweet voice and lovely laughter” were not expressed for the benefit of the poet, but for another, the brave Colonel whose valour was so inescapably signified by the loss of an arm. Swinburne had lost both muse and mistress. To all his different forms of identification with Sappho he could now add that of rejected lover, in its saddest form, factor c).

### **Submission to Sappho**

Not only had he lost Gordon, but other gentler muses had gone too: not only had Swinburne’s favourite sister, Edith had died a lingering death of consumption in 1863, but in 1862 Lizzie Siddall, Rossetti’s wife of whom Swinburne had grown very fond, had taken an overdose of

laudanum, and Swinburne had to give evidence at the inquest (Lang 49-50). Lady Trevelyan, Swinburne's "second mother" and "good angel" was also mortally ill with consumption which would kill her in 1866. A living muse would not be his. He was "barren stock", sexually sterile; His misery was palpable: Bell-Scott comments, "he suffers under a dislike of ladies of late – his knowledge of himself and of them increasing upon him" (Lang 1: 35-6). These are very telling words: he understood his own impotence and realized that he could not enjoy a sexual relationship with a woman: "that particular form of happiness .... I am now never likely to share."<sup>40</sup> In Gordon he had seen all the attributes of a living Sappho, all the inspiration of a living muse, but now that was denied to him, he must return again to the original. He would, after all, emulate Burton and lose himself, not in orientalism, but in Sappho herself. He would immerse himself in her as he did in the sea, embrace her as his "mother and lover" and in so doing, achieve his own male identity within the arms of his muse.<sup>41</sup>

Sappho had been with him implicitly since childhood. At East Dene she had enticed him with glimpses of sublimity through the sea and through the nightingale, and she had belonged to him as a member of his family: "brother and sister, were we, child and bird"; then she had identified herself at Eton and shown him different forms of the sublime, and provided him with comfort and an alternative sexual outlet; subsequently, she had exhibited her lability and been revived through literature and through art, offering a familial presence, but also allowing a glimpse of

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<sup>40</sup> There is little evidence of what happened; we can only surmise from his later letter to Gosse written on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1875, congratulating him on his engagement:

I wish you all the joy and good fortune that can be wished, and without admixture of envy of that particular form of happiness, which I am now never likely to share. I suppose it must be the best thing that can befall a man, to win and keep the woman that he loves while yet young; at any rate I can congratulate my friend on his good hap without any too jealous afterthought of the reverse experience which left my young manhood 'a barren stock'....(CW 18: 32-3)

For various speculations, see Henderson (86-70); McGann (213-226); Rooksby (101-104; 106-7) and the article by Lang, "Swinburne's Lost Love" (PMLA 123-30).

<sup>41</sup> Whether or not, Swinburne did consciously take a leaf out of Burton's book, I cannot say, but "Poems and Ballads: Second Series would be dedicated to "Richard F. Burton, in redemption of an old pledge, and in recognition of a friendship which I must always count amongst the highest honours of my life." It might well be the exemplum which he was referring to.

the glittering other. Now that he was so patently “barren stock”, he would yield to her, and become possessed by this all – powerful Sapphic muse, allow her to be both muse and mistress. She would be no gentle muse, but would take the form of as a series of metamorphosing images of the dominatrix, appearing now as Salammbô, now as Lucrezia Borgia, now as Mary Queen of Scots, or Catullus’ Lesbia, or even as the Lesbian poet herself. And if Sappho were not actually alive, if his muse was dead, what did it matter? After all, “books are to poets as much part of that life as pictures are to painters... Aeschylus and Sappho do not for us live only on the dusty shelves of libraries.” If need be, he would gain his inspiration from her through necrophilia.

In writing this chapter, I do not attempt to assert that Swinburne *consciously* underwent a process of Sapphic possession, or that the process was a linear one, but I do argue that there was, throughout the years leading up to the publication of Poems and Ballads:1 a constant interaction with a possessive Sapphic presence, and I do assert that that there is evidence to indicate that such a process did occur. I have been concerned to provide that evidence and to show how Swinburne became dependent on Sappho, became, in effect, possessed by her, through what I have termed factors a), b) and c): his affinity with her, his view of her as a form of the sublime, and the refuge he took with her, and the opportunity she offered for a substitute muse and mistress. Indeed, it was necessary for such a process to occur if Swinburne was to reconcile the lacuna between his lyric impulse and his own physical and emotional deficiencies. Earlier I quoted a remark by Fletcher who, in effect, claims that there was a sort of black hole within Swinburne that resulted in his verse being of “the surface only,” merely “imitation, parody and caricature.” I, on the other hand, argue that Swinburne’s “selfhood” was realized through the filling of that black hole by Sappho. In the following chapters I shall show how this Sapphic presence made itself felt, and enabled Swinburne to produce in Poems and Ballads:1 a form of poetics that far from being “of the surface only”, would like Sappho’s own, have the power to probe beneath the surface and “strike and sting” – both poet and reader.

### CHAPTER 3

#### OMNIPRESENT SAPPHO

The previous chapter detailed Sappho's attraction for Swinburne and showed how he came to depend on her both as a man and poet. In this chapter I shall examine Poems and Ballads: 1 in order to demonstrate the omnipresence of Sappho within the volume, and to explore how her Sapphic possession manifests itself. I have two further aims: a) to show how Swinburne's Sapphic experiences are translated into verse; b) to record how these instances privilege particular constructs of Sappho.

This chapter must be regarded in the light of an inventory of Sapphic appearances, and aims to reveal her presence, even in the most unlikely places, but it does not attempt to show her effect on the verse; in other words, it records rather than discusses. We shall see that Sappho's appearance in Poems and Ballads: 1 is the outcome of Swinburne's own experience, but I do not examine the process by which Sappho is translated from Swinburne's mind on to the page; this will belong to the next chapter where we see the intercourse between poet and muse in action. It treats Poems and Ballads: 1 as a sort of supermarket of Sapphic wares, but does not discuss the nature of the objects, their beauty, their purpose, or the use made of them by the "purchasers"; this will belong to later chapters; this chapter seeks to look at the volume in the light of a superlative sourcing centre.

A cursory glance through Poems and Ballads: 1 will immediately reveal instances of Sapphic presence: Sappho's name appears in four poems; her metre is imitated; fragments of her verses are transcribed; her tropes are constantly reiterated, particularly those of memory and forgetting, absence and presence, pleasure and pain, eros and thanatos. However, this cursory glance reveals only superficial traces, footprints, as it were, of Sappho, but not the Sapphic body of the Muse who had taken possession of Swinburne; this is because each mention of Sappho does not come in isolation, but is resonant with her other nuances: her Greekness, her Aberrance, her Lability and her Fracture. To recognise Swinburne's use of Sappho (or, as I shall later argue,

Sappho's use of Swinburne) and to understand the extent of her presence, we need to look beneath the surface and identify a multiplicity of further Sapphic references, some obvious, some cryptic and some implicit, and some which requiring searching out, but which taken together, constitute a resonating Sapphic soundboard operating throughout the volume. I shall look at these Sapphic footprints and footsteps, rather in the manner of a sleuth, looking to see what they can tell us, and to follow their trail to an actual Sapphic body.<sup>1</sup> I start by looking at the most obvious Sapphic "footprint", that of her name, and I aim to show how apparently superficial references to it, have a deeper significance than is initially apparent.

### **Sappho's footprints and footsteps**

There are five mentions of her name: i) beneath the title of "Anactoria" Swinburne places the Greek words of Aphrodite from Fragment 1: "Whom am I to persuade this time to lead you back to her love?" And in order to attribute the authorship, the name "Sappho" appears in capital letters below. This juxtaposition of Aphrodite and Sappho clearly places Sappho in an erotic context and announces the nature of her love; ii) a similar effect is obtained in "The Masque of Queen Bersabe" which contains a reference to Sappho in the form of a heading to one of the eighteen verses that are spoken by different aberrant women: "SAPPHO: 'I am queen of the Lesbians'"; iii) in "Sapphics" the name is again used to draw attention to her preference for same-sex love: "....Aphrodite..../ Called to her saying, 'turn to me, O my Sappho;'/ Yet she turned her face away from the loves"; iv) "Satia te Sanguine" contains a reference to "the lost white feverish limbs / Of the Lesbian Sappho...." which draws attention to the horror of her fate, her signification of sublimity, while the ensuing tenor of the poem associates her with sado-masochism (discussed below); v) towards the end of the poem "Anactoria", Sappho claims: "I, Sappho shall be one with all these things / With all high things forever", thus announcing her presence not merely as lyric muse, but as *aberrant* lyric muse.

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<sup>1</sup> The idea of the Sapphic footprint leading to a Sapphic body follows from a comment of Prins: "There exists a long tradition of reading Sappho as if she were a metrical body. Greek colometry described different kinds of meter by measuring poetry into body parts such as *kola*, (legs), *podes* (feet) and *daktyloi*, (fingers), and the Longinian treatise on the sublime also draws on this established homology between poem and body" (114).

These are far more than casual references since the poems in which they are found (9, 15, 46 and 50) punctuate Poems and Ballads: 1 and point the reader to a widespread Sappho's presence within the volume, revealing her as aberrant woman, signifier of the sublime and as lyric muse, and they also indicate that there is oscillation between these three constructs. This nomenclature celebrates Swinburne's identification of Sappho's name as a term to define his own early intimations of the sublime, the aberrance within it and its lyric beauty, an association which he discovered at Eton. We can also, perhaps, see a particular linkage between two of these references and Swinburne's own later association with her: "...the lost white feverish limbs" are reminders of the Culver Cliff episode: "... if I did return to the foot of the cliff again it should be in a fragmentary condition, and there would not be much of me to pick up" (Gordon 15). The use of the name "Sappho" constitutes the imprint of her signature, it is her autograph stamped upon the volume.

The use of Classical metres constitutes a different sort of footstep, one that might be described as a familiar, measured tread. As we saw in the last chapter, flagellation was particularly associated in Swinburne's mind with learning Sappho and her metres. This interplay was to have a lasting effect. Reynolds comments: "For Swinburne personally....it would appear that beating, flagellation, 'sporting an arse' was the key erotic experience that informed his poetry" (SH 172-3). Swinburne himself claims: "The sound of many verses of Blake's cleave to the sense long after conscious thought of the meaning has passed from one: a sound like the running of water or the ringing of bells in a long lull of the wind" (CW 16: 361). Here he is surely comparing the sensation caused by the rhythmic sound of the verse with the painful/pleasurable after-effects of flagellation. Prins specifically points to how these sensations become expressed by metre: "The marks left on his body allow it to materialise as a function of metre and make it legible as the body of a poet who has learned his lesson in prosody" (151).

In his experimental use of Classical metre in Poems and Ballads: 1, painstakingly described by Lafourcade (LJ2 441- 463), we can see Swinburne's attempt to return to discipline of the Eton Metre Mistress. For example, as Lafourcade points out, the heptameters of Aristophanes are



mimicked in “Hymn to Proserpine” (LJ2 452). Interestingly, in “Dedicatory Epistle” Swinburne compares the metre to “the gallop of the horses of the sun” (Hyder SR 98) which, while ostensibly referring to Apollo, could well contain an oblique reference to the fearsome galloping of Gordon during their forays together. “Hesperia” uses a form of hexameters that imitates the Classical usage rather than “the feeble and tuneless form of metre called hexameters in English; if form of metre that may be called which has neither metre nor form” (CW 15: 151). In “Hendecasyllabics” he uses a metre that is used commonly in Catullus, whom, as we have seen, is closely linked in his mind with Sappho. “Stage Love” uses the very galliambics for which Swinburne had suffered his Eton beating when imitating Catullus’ “Attis” and which, as we saw in the last chapter, he came to associate with the dominatrix. “Phaedra”, as Lafourcade comments, “reproduit le style grec à la perfection” (LJ2 445).<sup>2</sup> But the most obvious imitation of Classical metre is, of course, “Sapphics”.

Lafourcade comments on Swinburne’s efforts to adhere as closely as possible to the Sapphic metre in the poem: “Il est très remarquable que Swinburne ait employé dans la deuxième mesure des trois premiers vers, et dans la dernière du quatrième, un spondée toutes les fois qu’il lui été possible.”<sup>3</sup> He points out that Swinburne attempts to do this, in spite of his own convictions that “in English all dactylic and spondaic forms of verse are unnatural and abhorrent” (460). In fact, Swinburne chooses to privilege “the charm of its regular variations”, i.e. the Greek form of the Sapphic ode.<sup>4</sup> Speaking of the importance of this link between Sappho and metre in this poem Prins comments:

The conversion of “embodied” song into a written pattern, a conversion of rhythm into metre, will demonstrate yet again what Swinburne has learned from the Sapphic

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<sup>2</sup> “...reproduces the Greek style to perfection.”

<sup>3</sup> “It is very remarkable that in the last stress of the three first verses and in the last of the fourth, Swinburne has employed a spondee whenever possible.”

<sup>4</sup> “The rhythmic reason of its [the form of the Pindaric Ode, in which he includes the Sapphic] rigid, but not arbitrary law, lies simply and solely in ‘the charm of its regular variations’” (“Dedicatory Epistle”; Hyder SR 97).

scene of instruction: the impact of Sappho's "literal and absolute words" on the body of his own writing. (140)

"Sapphics" celebrates both Sappho's own lyrical mastery and her role as Metre Mistress. If Swinburne evokes Sappho's presence through the use of Greek metre, he also imitates one particularly significant metrical effect. In "Eros and Incantation: Sappho and Oral Poetry" Charles Segal writes of Fragment 31: "The repetitions and recurrent rhythms of the poetic language evoke the magical effects of eros itself and this magic is also the mysterious peitho or thelxis which the archaic poetess undergoes when gripped by the beauty of the young girl" (Greene RS 59). By the use of similar incantatory metrical effects Swinburne reproduces this Sapphic thelxis, an effect which T. S. Eliot famously described as "the hallucination of meaning..." (149), and McGann defines as "a diffuseness, a fuzz of words and linguistic forms which become an incantation or monotone" (327). The complicated working of this Sapphic effect can be seen in "Faustine", where the iambic metre, (a, b, a, b, c, b, c, b) creates a mesmeric effect that is directly attributed to Sappho: "Stray breaths of Sapphic song that blew/ Through Mitylene / Shook the fierce quivering blood in you / By night, Faustine."

The hypnotic effect of Sapphic thelxis can be seen throughout Poems and Ballads: 1, and I offer two examples: the first, the soporific iambs of "The Garden of Proserpine":

She waits for each and other,  
She waits for all men born;  
Forgets the earth her mother,  
The life of fruit and corn.

My second example shows from the deadening effect of the combination of anapaests and iambs in "Dolores":

Thou wert fair in the fearless old fashion,  
And thy limbs are as melodies yet,

And move to the music of passion,  
With lithe and lascivious regret.

The Sapphic presence is reinforced in each poem by a further Sapphic construct: the Greek in “The Garden of Proserpine”, and the dominatrix in “Dolores.” Moreover, the melodious limbs are none other than “the lost white feverish limbs / Of the Lesbian Sappho adrift,” described in “Satia Te Sanguine”. It is *her* “podes” and “dactyli” that move to produce Swinburne’s own “echoing chant.” The effect of this Sapphic thelxis was so intense that its effect could actually be witnessed, as Gosse tells us: “At Cambridge the young men joined hands and marched along shouting “Dolores...” He comments further: “As an eminent critic, then an undergraduate at Oxford, has said, ‘it simply swept us off our legs with rapture’” (ACS 160-1). The limbs of the living entwined with Sappho’s “lost white feverish limbs” had become a living celebration of Swinburne’s Sapphic possession.

We have heard footfall in the stamping of Sappho’s name and the treading of her metres, but her fragments can be better identified as a set of broken footmarks leading this way and that through the volume. If the use of the name and the imitation of her metre possess a far greater significance than would at first appear, the influence of the Sapphic fragment is even more expressive. Reynolds comments:

Sewing Sappho’s fragments, or rather his versions, his translations of those fragments into his own verse, Swinburne takes Sappho’s body, makes it the field of his image, and translates her “loosened limbs”, fragments of her verse, into his own poetry. (182)

However, this Sappho-sewing is rather more complex than Reynolds suggests. In his discussion of “Anactoria” Lafourcade offers what he terms “une liste de ces fragments”, and identifies some ten Sapphic references (451), and William Rutland makes a similar list ([Swinburne](#) 85). But there are, in fact, only three significant occasions where Sappho’s actual words occur at any

length, all taken from fragment 1, and the choice of fragments is surprising and needs closer scrutiny, since the words do not seem to mesh easily with Swinburne's.

The first fragment is found in the subscription to the title of "Anactoria", as I mentioned above. However, the poem is *not* actually about the identity of Anactoria, as the words would suggest: "Whom am I to persuade this time to lead you back to her love?" Rather, it is concerned with the nature of Sappho's relationship with her lover; nor is the fragment particularly pertinent to Sappho's meditation within the poem, since the poet is unconcerned with the substitution of another lover for Anactoria.

The second reference is a translation of the words spoken by Aphrodite: "Who does thee wrong, / Sappho?" (73-74) Again, the quotation does not seem to have any real bearing on the subject of the poem, i.e. Sappho's masochistic relationship with Anactoria and her own immortality; they are, in fact, awkwardly introduced by the trope of the dream: "I beheld in sleep the light that is / In her high place in Paphos... / saw Love." The third reference is a loose translation of Aphrodite's subsequent words: "Even she that flies shall follow for thy sake, / And she shall give thee gifts that would not take, / Shall kiss that would not kiss thee" (81-82). Aphrodite's words are then rather awkwardly linked with the contradictory conjunction "but", as Sappho returns to addressing Anactoria. "...*but* thou – thy body is the song." Aphrodite's next words are introduced with another disjunctive preposition, "yet": "*Yet* the queen laughed from her sweet heart and said: / "Even she that flies shall follow for thy sake, / And she shall give thee gifts that would not take, / Shall kiss that would not kiss thee" (emphasis added). Again, this reference does not seem apposite to the thrust of the poem since "Anactoria" is concerned with the present lovemaking and does not look to any future occasion.

These fragments are not seamlessly interwoven, "sewn" as Reynolds describes them; they are awkwardly placed, mere jagged fragments, but that is their point: the quotations chosen for "Anactoria" come from one of the best known of Sappho's fragments (1), and they point to Sappho's words specifically as fragments. Swinburne's purpose is, I argue, not to integrate them seamlessly, but to announce their presence *as* Sapphic fragments within the poem, to trumpet

Sappho's presence, and specifically to display her as a signifier of fracture, a trope developed in the body of the poem in the repetitious use of words describing brokenness: "severed", "bruised", "crushed", "broken", "shuddering", "beaten", "scourge", "break", "scourged", "bruise", "fragments", "quivering", "crush", "torture", "pang", "convulse", "shaken", "trample", "shudder", "tremble".

In "Anactoria" Swinburne establishes Sappho's presence with the crude use of the fragment. In his apologia for the poem he explains his reluctance to produce an actual translation: "I felt myself incompetent to give adequate expression in English to the literal and absolute words of Sappho and would not debase and degrade them into a viler form (Notes 21)." He has a fear of producing the unworthy result he sees in Catullus' translation of Fragment 31: "A more beautiful translation there never was nor ever will be; but compared with the Greek it is colourless and bloodless" ... Instead he acknowledges the superior power of his possessor, by openly stating his desire "to cast my spirit into the mould of hers" (Notes 21). In so doing he will affirm factors a), b) and c): acknowledge their commonality, attempt to replicate her sublimity, and take refuge with her. An obvious example of this can be viewed in the poem when he recasts fragment 31: "Sweat pours" from Sappho, she seems "little short of dying" and she is seized by trembling. Swinburne translates these symptoms: "I feel thy blood against my blood; my pain / Pains thee, and lips bruise lips, and vein stings vein."<sup>5</sup> Sappho cannot see for love and Swinburne echoes this: "thine eyes blind me". Sappho feels "a delicate fire beneath the skin"; Swinburne reproduces the metaphor: "Let life burn down and dream it is not death." In fact he recasts Sappho's passion in terms of his own masochism. Later in the poem he recollects fragments 49 and 131. He writes: "And they shall know me as ye who have known me here, / Last year when I loved Atthis, and this year / When I love thee..." The poem becomes a triumphant acclamation of Sappho and her loss of Anactoria becomes meaningless, it is

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<sup>5</sup> In her discussion of the poem Greer reads the words: "ἰδρωσ κακχεεται", normally translated as "sweat pours from me", as referring to Sappho's loss of bladder control under the duress of sexual excitement (113-5): in effect "pee pours out." Snyder quoting Irwin, sees the words "χλωροτερα δε ποιας" usually translated as "paler than grass", as referring to moisture, and she suggests the possibility of the words referring to the dampness of the vagina prior to orgasm (Greene RRS33). Swinburne echoes this sexualised moistening by describing the contusion of blood prior to ejaculation: "my blood strengthens and my veins abound."

Sappho's enduring power that counts: "Yea, though thou diest, I say I shall not die." Significantly, the poem was written the year after Gordon had announced her engagement (1863). In acclaiming Sappho through her fragments Swinburne declares his changed allegiance, his submission to the Sapphic muse.

Sapphic Fragments leave their indelible mark, pronounced footprints, but they also reveal themselves as echoing footsteps. It is not only the reworking of Sapphic fragments, but their resonances resounding throughout the volume which reflect the extent to which Swinburne has become possessed by Sappho. To track down resonances of every Sapphic fragment would be impossible, and many may well be subliminal; instead, I offer a few significant examples.

In the first stanza of "A Ballad of Life" Swinburne's lady stands in "a place of wind and flowers, / Full of sweet trees and colour of glad grass"; in Fragment 31 Sappho is "greener than grass." Continuing to draw from the same fragment Swinburne echoes the debilitating effect of eros: like Sappho, who can neither hear or see, he reduced to faintness: his blood is made to "burn and swoon"; a metaphor that is also used by Sappho: "a subtle fire has stolen beneath my flesh", and again in Fragment 48: "you roast us." There is also an echo of the "moisturising effect" of passion: Sappho claims, "sweat pours from me" while Swinburne's poet is "like a flame rained upon." Swinburne follows Sappho in emphasising the power of the moon: in Sappho's fragment the stars hide themselves as the moon's light encompasses the world (Fragment 34). For Swinburne it is "fervent" and "fiery, and the triumphant lunar power will become a transferred epithet introducing the figure of the dominatrix, since the lady is, in fact, Swinburne's long-admired Lucretia Borgia. This reworking of the fragment proclaims a Sapphic presence within the verse in the form of the dominatrix.

In "Laus Veneris" the fragment is used rather differently, but again it indicates the presence of the dominatrix. The horsel is sited in a pastoral situation, fertile and well-watered: "beyond the windy wheat, / And past the vineyard and the water- spring." It resembles the temple of Aphrodite situated where "cold water babbles through the apple-branches" (Fragment 2), but while within *her* temple Cypris (Venus) receives the homage of her worshippers in the form of

“golden cups of nectar”, inside the horsel Venus presides over “little chambers [that] drip with flower-like red”. The pastoral idyll lies unobtainable “outside in the world of men” since Tannhäuser is imprisoned under the domination of Venus; and the comparison with Sappho’s joyous worshippers makes his fate more poignant. However, Sappho herself, as we shall see below, is another construct of Venus, thus the reworking has moved away from Sappho and has now returned to her in a hermeneutic circle. Such a reworking makes a strong affirmation of Sapphic presence.

“August” is a reworking of Fragment 105 which, I suggest, has a particular relevance for Swinburne. Maxwell views this poem in the light of a tribute to Sappho. She adds: “In ‘August’ the image of the apples ripening could also suggest a young woman’s maturing sexuality if, as it seems likely, Swinburne recalls this Sapphic fragment” (199). Indeed, the fragment has traditionally been considered as part of an epithalamium: “It was Sappho who compared the girl to an apple... And likened the bridegroom to Achilles...” (Himerius: Orations 9:16; Campbell 132-3). The apple has a double significance, not only through its association with courtship gifts, but in its coded reference to the sexuality of the unmarried girl, since the word “μαλον” was a generic term covering any fleshy fruit, and acted as a signifier of desire.<sup>6</sup> Swinburne draws from this trope of ripening female sexuality: γλυκυμαλον (sweet- apple) by the use of colour: “There were four apples on the bough / Half gold half red, that one might know / The blood was ripe within the core”. He develops the trope of blood which might well imply the rupture of the hymen with its vaginal bleeding: the apples are “red-stained”; “The sweet blood filled them to the core.” There is even suggestion of the smell that entices the male animal to the female: “The warm smell of the fruit was good”; “The warm smell grew more sharp.”

This poem exemplifies what Swinburne means when he says “I have cast my spirit into the mould of hers”, and also refracts his own sexual awakening for the poem is pervaded by Sapphic “ποθος”, a sense of yearning. The apple pickers cannot reach the apple, but like Keats’ figures in

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<sup>6</sup> In “The Garden of the Nymphs: Public and Private in Sappho’s Lyrics” Winkler asserts that the word has clitoral reference (Greene RS 104); this may possibly be the case, but I do not find his arguments particularly convincing.

“Ode to A Grecian Urn”, remain forever static. In “August” the poet too, remains yearning as he waits with his head “against the stem” in the “mute afternoon” for “my lady’s feet / [to] Draw close”. This yearning may well look back to Summer holidays spent in company with Gordon at their grandfather’s house actually called “The Orchard”, when Gordon’s sexuality was ripening and she was still within reach: “That August time it was delight”, and when the ambience of home and the familial presence kept the boy safe: “The peace of time wherein love dwelt. Commenting on Sappho’s fragment, Richard Jenkyns remarks: “With great subtlety Sappho uses her simile to suggest not only the desirability and inaccessibility of the apple, but also simultaneously, that it is about to fall into the hands of whoever may be waiting below when the time is ripe” (Three Classical Poets 43). Like the apple-pickers’, the poet’s yearning would be in vain: Swinburne’s γλυκυμαλον was to fall, as we have seen, not into his ready hands, but into the single hand of one-armed Colonel Disney-Leith.

Sappho’s footprints and footsteps have so far been clear and unmistakable, but there are fainter traces that can also be described in poems that have apparently little obvious connection with her, and I regard “Hendecasyllabics” as a case in point. To illustrate what I mean, I compare the following lines: “Till I heard a noise as of waters / Moving tremulous under the feet of angels / Multitudinous out of heaven” and “.....beautiful swift sparrows whirring fast-beating wings brought you above the dark earth down from heaven through the mid-air”(Fragment 1). In each there is the same tremulous sound of flying creatures leaving their own heavenly domain for the earth, and a sense of awe at their approach is apparent in each. I compare: “Knew the fluttering wind, the fluttered foliage, / Shaken fitfully, full of sound and shadow” with “Love shook my heart like a wind falling on oaks on a mountain” (Fragment 47). Each concentrates on the sound and effect of wind on leaves, and in each case the sound is threatening: “full of sound and shadow” and “falling on oaks on a mountain”; each anticipates imminent destruction. For each poet the garland is an impetus to sorrow: Sappho remembers when her beloved used to adorn herself with garlands when they were together (Fragment 94), she herself *used* to weave garlands (Fragment 125). Swinburne regards “Pale white chaplets and crowns of later seasons, / Fair false leaves (but the Summer leaves were falser).” I compare: “All the fruits of the day from all her branches / Gathered, neither is there any left to gather”, with Sappho’s sweet apple that



the gatherers could not reach. Each poet regrets the fruit which becomes a symbol of unrealised desire. These frequent interpolations, whether translated, reconstructed or echoed, show the omnipresence of Sappho, but they also reflect Swinburne's own anxieties and obsessions, particularly with regard to the realisation of sexual desire.

### **Sapphic Tropes:**

This last section has been concerned with Sapphic fragments and their resonance within Poems and Ballads: 1, but the fragments and their echoings have also drawn from and replicated Sapphic tropes; and I now look in more detail at the widespread presence of these tropes, and consider how they reflect Swinburne's own experiences. These are footprints that merge with Swinburne's own.

Above I spoke of “ποθος”, the yearning with which Sappho's verse is redolent.<sup>7</sup> As Page du Bois comments: “the relationship of desire and withholding, of presence and absence seems to move Sappho to write, to create in the elusive, illusive fragmentary net of words, the absent one, the desired one” (52). Reynolds comments more succinctly: “Sappho's poems are about desire, and loss, and the memory of desire” (1). Poems and Ballads: 1 is redolent with these tropes.<sup>8</sup> To take two random examples: in “A Leave-taking” the poet says, “Let us go hence and rest; she will not love. She shall not hear us if we sing thereof.” In “Félise” the poet cries, “I had died for this last year, to know / You loved me.... / Now, though your love seek mine for mate, / It is too late.”

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<sup>7</sup> Tropes of Remembering /Forgetting can be found in fragments 49;55; 94; 105; 147; the tropes of Absence / Presence are particularly prevalent in 49; 55; 94; 105; 131.

<sup>8</sup> In particular: “A Ballad of Life”; “A Ballad of Death”; “Laus Veneris”; “A leave-taking”; “Itylus”; “Ilicet”; “Anima Anceps”; “In The Orchard”; “A Match”; “Faustine”; “A Cameo”; “Song before Death”; “Rococo”; “A Ballad of Burdens”; “Rondel”; “Before the Mirror”; “April”; “Before Parting”; “The Sundew”; “Félise”; “An Interlude”; “The Two Dreams”; “Love and Sleep”; “The Year of Love”.

“An Interlude” brings together the tropes of Memory and Desire, Absence and Presence, and in so doing, privileges another Sapphic trope, that of fracture. The poem starts “between the dawn and daytime”, in the fissure, as it were between the two lights.<sup>9</sup> The trope of fracture continues throughout the poem: “the *pulse* of the grass at your feet” and “the meadowsweet *shook*” recall the effects of flagellation, while “you *passed* me as April *passes*” and “You waved and *passed*” indicate the fracturing of the relationship. These instances combine with the fracturing effect of memory: “I remember, forget and remember / What I saw done and undone”; the poem concludes:

I remember the way we parted  
The day and the way we met;  
You hoped we were both broken-hearted,  
And knew we should both forget.

All has been fractured and dissolved. Desire is more subtly indicated: “Till a sunbeam straight like a finger / Struck sharp through the leaves at you”; “I saw where the sun’s hand pointed, / I knew what the bird’s note said.” Both are obviously transferred epithets: the “finger” and “hand” of the sun indicate the desired action of the writer: “The meaning of May was clear” indicates the unequivocal nature of the intended sexual act.

“An Interlude” reflects Sappho’s presence through its tropes of Memory, Desire and Fracture; its concentration on feet and fingers also bring to mind Sappho’s “dactyli” and “podes”, mentioned above, while the poem as a whole recalls the earlier poem “Hide and Seek” and refracts Swinburne’s childhood erotic games with the early dominatrix, Gordon. For example: “And the flag-flowers lightened with laughter / And the meadowsweet shook with love” echoes “Shrank she laughing in the large green reeds, / Shrank she laughing more as I drew nearer, / Hiding her laugh in the long wet flowering weeds.” Swinburne would have felt the particular appositeness

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<sup>9</sup> Swinburne often elects to position his poems in such a fissure of time, as for example: “Before Dawn”; “Hendecasyllabics” begins “In the month of the long decline of roses”.

of these tropes of memory and desire after his rejection by her; and we can see their reworking throughout “The Triumph of Time”, (the poem which is now generally considered to result from their separation).<sup>10</sup> The leitmotif of the poem: “These things are over and no more mine”, is an echoing of Fragment 49, “I loved you once, Atthis, long ago”. Such tropes are worked and reworked throughout the volume, making it a sounding board of Sapphic memory, and giving expression not only to Swinburne’s personal rejection by Gordon, (and indeed many of the poems were written before this event ), but to Swinburne’s own increasing realisation that satisfaction must give way to Sapphic *ποθος*.

Two further Sapphic tropes that appear in Poems and Ballads: 1 are the alternating expression of pleasure and pain. Such tropes have their root in Sappho’s definition of eros as “bitter-sweet” and reflect the Sapphic effect of flagellation. “A Match”, for instance, postulates the potentialities of erotic sadomasochism with its leitmotif: “If you were queen of pleasure, / And I were king of pain....” “Satia Te Sanguine” is entirely given over to the theme of sadism encapsulated in the line: “You suck with a sleepy red lip / The wet red wounds in his heart.”

However, most prevalent of all Sapphic tropes are eros and thanatos and they emanate naturally from those already mentioned, Memory and Desire, Absence and Presence, Pleasure and Pain. For example, in fragment 55 the ideas of separation, absence and memory are closely interwoven with death: the woman is now alive, but *will* be dead; after she is dead there will be no remembering or desire for her by the living or by posterity; and Sappho enhances the idea of the woman’s forgotten-ness, by showing her frantic movements (“φοιτασής”) among the shades. And yet, because of Sappho’s skill, there *is* memory of her; or is there? We know she existed, but we do not know who she was. Swinburne plays similar memory games in “After Death” where the dead man is assured by the coffin boards that he has been forgotten by his family: wife, son, maid and servant, all of whom, it would appear, were responsible for his death, are now cheerfully enjoying the good things of life, while he can only anticipate total oblivion.

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<sup>10</sup> For a detailed discussion of the connection between Swinburne’s parting with Gordon and “The Triumph of Time”, see McGann (13-218); Henderson (87) and Rooksby (101-110).

However, the dead man *is* now alive to us, since we hear his spoken words; there is even an echo of Sappho's dead woman going "to and fro among the shadowy corpses, in Swinburne's dead man providing "flesh to feed hell's worms upon." Again, in "Memory of Walter Savage Landor" we see the poet both alive and dead, and the last stanza "So shall thy lovers come from far, / Mix with thy name / As morning star with evening star / His faultless fame" echoes the trope of the star in Sappho's Fragment 104: "Hesperus bringing everything that shining Dawn shattered."

However, the most common association with thanatos in both Sappho and Swinburne is eros. Guiliana Lanata comments on the frequency of the death desire in ancient amatory lyric, but points to its specific use in Sappho to "express a moment typical of the Sapphic experience of eros" which repeats itself and is "institutionally germane to the Sapphic circle, or when faced with the impossibility of possession, which thus suggests as a solution the desire for death" (in Greene RRS 19). Of course, Swinburne had no actual wish to die, but the trope of the Sapphic death-wish, "...and honestly I wish I were dead" (94), had been most attractive to him from his earliest years: "He used before and after his schooldays, to write dramas of a bloodcurdling and highly tragic nature in which a frequent stage direction – 'stabs the king' - passed into a family joke" (Gordon 9). And as he grew older the *idea* of death offered a kind of cerebral alternative to the actual sexual satisfaction that he was unable to achieve; and these jostling Sapphic tropes of eros and thanatos can be viewed throughout the volume, offering yet another instance of factor c), a taking refuge through Sappho's tropes and substituting her tropes of imagined thanatos for the eros he was denied. For instance, in "Rondel" the poet asks, "What new thing would love not relish worse? / Unless, perhaps, white death had kissed me there, / Kissing her hair." "In The Orchard" is given over to the reiteration of this trope.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Nay, slay me now; nay for I will be slain; / Pluck thy red pleasure from the teeth of pain."; "And with the slain of love, love's ways are strewn, / And with their blood, if love will have it so." "Slay me ere day can slay desire again... / Yea, with thy sweet lips, with thy sweet sword; yea, / Take life and all, for I will die, I say; / Love, I gave love, is life a better boon?" Other significant poems containing this leitmotif are: "A Ballad of Death"; "Phaedra"; "Les Noyades"; "The Leper" "Anactoria"; "Erotion", "Dolores"; "The Garden of Proserpine" and "The Two Dreams".

Sapphic tropes so remarkably akin to Swinburne's own obsessions, are perhaps the most constant indicator of Sappho's presence within the volume; they are clear cut and plainly visible, but they are not found in isolation, they operate through the juxtaposition of antitheses, and reflect Sappho's own use of antonyms in her verse. This mimicking of Sapphic oscillation between life/death, eros/thanatos, pleasure/pain, absence/ presence, remembering/forgetting, operates throughout Poems and Ballads: 1 and explores her interest in in-betweenness, the seemingly impossible areas where antitheses merge and become conflated.<sup>12</sup> In "Dolores", for example, we see the merging of peace/strife; pain/pleasure; death/life.

And they laughed, changing hands in the measure,  
And they mixed and made peace after strife;  
Pain melted in tears and was pleasure,  
Death tingled with blood and was life.

This "melting and tingling" presided over by the Sapphic dominatrix, "Our Lady of Pain" suggests Sappho's construct of lability (which we saw illustrated in Chapter 1 in her movement from one persona to another and her constant metamorphoses through translation and reception). These are slippery footsteps and draw from Sapphic lability. Such lability provided another instance of factor a): their commonality reflects Swinburne's own oscillation between extremes. Henderson comments: "By nature a rebel, it was always necessary, it seems, for him to have someone before whom he could abase himself, his nature swinging perpetually between the twin poles of submission and self abasement"(7). There were other oscillations; he seemed unwilling to recognise his age, claiming to be some years younger than he was.<sup>13</sup> As we saw in the last chapter, he moved between human and bird form, he even oscillated between life and death: Gosse tells us: "Sometimes without warning he would suddenly fall down in a fit, and become

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<sup>12</sup> "If you were queen of pleasure / And I was king of pain ("A Match"); "But evil saith to good: My brother, / My brother I am one with thee ("Ilicet"); "Here life has death for neighbour" ("The Garden of Proserpine"); "I wish you were dead, my dear"; ("Satia Te Sanguine") "My life is bitter with thy love" ("Anactoria").

<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the opposite could occur: Swinburne's ambivalent age is commented on by Lord Lytton in his letter of August 25<sup>th</sup>: "he says he is 26; he looks 16" (Lang: 1: 174).

unconscious as though dead. But as soon as the fit passed he was perfectly well again, indeed better than before” (ACS 99). But the greatest oscillation, as we have seen, was in his sexuality: with his “dancing footsteps”, he occupied the sphere of neither masculinity nor femininity, like Sappho he belonged to both sexes – or neither, and in aping her tropes of sexual lability he could once again benefit from factor c, establishing a refuge from his own lack of masculinity.

### **Hidden footprints**

So far I have examined Sappho’s footprints and heeded her footsteps, and I have indicated how in their different ways such clues to a Sapphic presence are remarkably clear and would have been readily recognisable to the educated Victorian reader. But, as we saw in the last chapter, Swinburne had evolved his own constructs of Sappho in the course of his possession by her, and it is to these hidden footsteps that I now turn, to see how they too, reveal their Sapphic form less obviously, but nevertheless unmistakably. I start by looking at those poems which would, on the face of it, have little or no Sapphic resonance. My intention here is to show how even apparently un-Sapphic verses are, in fact, imbued by her. I look at poems dedicated to Walter Savage Landor and to Victor Hugo, at the political poems and at the ballads at the end of the volume.

It would surely appear that poems dedicated to other artists must constitute a turning away from Sappho and certainly these two poems would seem to lack immediate Sapphic reference. But we remember that it was necessary for Swinburne to have objects of adoration as a sort of sexual substitute, and how, at Eton Landor and Hugo had provided this necessary outlet, and we also saw how they became conflated with, and constituted part of, his adoration of Sappho and that they had actual links with Sappho. In each of these two poems we can see an expression of this: in “To Victor Hugo” the poet’s wisdom is praised: his “hand felt the thunder”, and he is cognisant of “laurels and lightnings, mixtures of “sunbeams and soft air”, “mist with sea”, but even here Sappho’s superiority is implicitly acknowledged by her symbol: “the lute’s pulses with the *louder* lyre”(emphasis added). In the poem “In Memory of Walter Savage Landor”, Swinburne looks for Landor “by this white wandering waste of sea,” in other words he sees him in a Sapphic topos: “in lonely places or at sea.”

Like the two dedicatory poems “A Song in Time of Order” and “A Song in Time of Revolution” use a male signifier, this time Mazzini, to reach out towards Sappho. These are early poems, (placed very early by Lafourcade who sees them as a re-writing of poems of the fifties), and they belong to a time when Swinburne was first drawn to the ideal of political freedom. Indeed, in “Thalassius” he describes its importance for his alter ego: “High things the high song taught him.../ Yea, one thing stronger and more high than God.../And that was liberty”. However, as Praz points out, for Swinburne the concept of Liberty was another version of the dominatrix (264). Indeed, in “Anactoria” we find that Thalassius’ “high things” are associated, not with Liberty, but with Sappho: “I Sappho shall be one with all these things, / With *all high things* forever.” This revolutionary fervour was an early manifestation of reaching after objects of adoration, whose expression would find voice through Sappho; and Sapphic traces can be seen in these poems: in “the *pulse* of the tide of the sea”, “the kisses that *sting*”, “*the Austrian whips*”, all recall the Metre Mistress whose own verses also “sting”.

These ballads grouped together towards the end of the volume show little immediate evidence of Sapphism; however, there is more Sapphic presence than might be immediately apparent, and I cite the following Sapphic constructs: a) the figure of the cruel dominatrix in “The King’s Daughter” “After Death”, “The Bloody Son” and “The Sea Swallows”; b) the trope of the bird in “The Sea Swallows” that signifies both Sappho and Swinburne; c) the incantatory rhythms (discussed above) that echo Sappho’s own; d) the trope of thanatos in all five poems. However, it is manifestly the case that there is less Sapphism in these poems than in others. Swinburne’s interest in ballads, like the political poems and the dedicatory poems, belongs to an earlier period (1859-61) when he was still “looking for Sappho”. He had been attracted to the ballad form, particularly when it referred to the figure of the cruel or aberrant woman, and also for the incantatory insistence that he saw in Sappho. He had tried emulating the ballads much as he had tried to imitate Shelley, to capture something Sapphic, but he had abandoned an attempt to publish a volume of ballads. Lafourcade offers a number of reasons for this, but it seems clear to me that they were abandoned because they drew so little from Sappho, and lacked her inspiration, and because he knew it. Lafourcade comments: “Il faut bien convenir que les

ballades de Swinburne manquent d'âme; elles n'ont pas le soufflé et l'unité des originaux qu'il a si habilement reconstitués" (153).<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the ballad form was unsuited to Swinburne's genius as he must surely have realised since in his study of Rossetti's verse he writes: "There can be no pause in a ballad, and no excess; nothing that flags and nothing that overflows; there must be no waste of a word or a minute in the course of its rapid and fiery motion" (CW: 15: 27). He describes a very different sort of verse from his own, since his words constantly "overflow" and words are forever being "wasted"; this is part of his genius.<sup>15</sup> These poems are unremarkable *because* they lack the presence of the full complement of Sapphic constructs; it is when Swinburne ceases to be fully possessed by Sappho that the poet's verses, to quote Lafourcade: "manquent d'âme." I hope to show in the next chapter that the greater the Sapphic presence, the greater the verse.

### **Sappho's Embodiments**

So far we have seen how Sapphic footprints and footsteps cross and re-cross the pages of Poems and Ballads:1, some very visible, some less so, but there can be no doubt that her presence was apparent to Swinburne's audience, probably more clearly than to us since their familiarity with her various constructs was greater than ours. But the volume does not simply contain footfall, Sappho's physical presence could also be discerned within the pages of the volume, and it is to this that I now look, at the presence to which the footsteps have led, Sappho's embodiment, or rather, embodiments, since, as we have seen, Sappho has many forms. Like the footsteps some embodiments would have been clearly discerned by the reader, while others were personal to Swinburne. I now look at their different forms within Poems and Ballads: 1. I begin with Sappho's Greek body.

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<sup>14</sup> "It must be admitted that Swinburne's ballads lack spirit, they lack the power and the unity of the originals that he has so readily reconstructed."

<sup>15</sup> See T.S. Eliot: "But the diffuseness is essential; had Swinburne practised greater concentration his verse would not be better in the same kind, but a different thing. His diffuseness is one of his glories" (145).



In all these Sapphic footsteps mentioned so far: her name, her metre, her fragments and her multiple tropes, there has been a constant implicit assertion of Sappho's Greekness, and we have automatically noted that one of the ways in which Sappho defines her presence is through her Greek "dress": not only does she announce her presence through metre, but she adopts actual Greek personae: she appears as the Lesbian lover of Anactoria, she becomes one of nineteen *femmes fatales* of the Ancient world in "Masque of Queen Bersabe"; she consorts with Aphrodite in "Sapphics". And in these appearances, she signifies not just a Greek presence, but an aberrant Greek presence which emerges from the unmentionable side of the Ancient World. "Itylus" (which is discussed in the final chapter) is a particular example, since the speaker of the poem, Philomela, emerges from the darkest of Greek legends, but she is also associated with the Sapphic nightingale.<sup>16</sup> Images of the Greek Sappho are often complex: for example, in "Phaedra" Sappho can be identified with the Phaedra of Euripides' *Hippolytus* as a victim of erotic love, an impression strengthened through the echoing of Fragment 31: "Are not my cheeks as grass, my body pale?" And at the same time the words recall Racine's identification of the two in *Phèdre* since he had intertextualised the fragment with the heroine's words.<sup>17</sup>

There are less obvious, but unmistakable Sapphic shapes in the poems: "A Litany" celebrates the cruelty and indifference of the old gods and act as a reminder of that other Greece to which Sappho belongs: "You shall seek me and shall not reach me". In "A Lamentation" the power of dominant and merciless female deities is celebrated: "...the kinless night, / Mother of gods without form or name"; "...dumb, the goddesses underground / Wait." Lafourcade comments, "*A Litany* et surtout *A Lamentation* m'ont toujours semblé être des projets de chœur pour *Atalanta*"(423).<sup>18</sup> If Lafourcade is correct, and it seems reasonable to conclude that he is, because of the similarities with the choruses of the play, the lines associates themselves not only with the cruelty of the Ancient gods, but with their creatures, the two aberrant Greek women of

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<sup>16</sup> Lafourcade points out that the source of Swinburne's inspiration for "Itylus" was not only the legend itself, but two fragments from Sappho: "Why, Irana, does Pandion's daughter, the swallow (wake me)?" (Fragment 135) and "...the messenger of spring, the lovely-voiced nightingale"(Fragment 136) (449).

<sup>17</sup> This is fully discussed by DeJean (86-7).

<sup>18</sup> "'A Litany' and particularly 'A Lamentation' have always seemed to me to be ideas for the chorus of 'Atalanta'.

the play, the cross-dressing Atalanta and the cruel dominatrix Althaea, both of whom can be seen as Sapphic simulacra. Furthermore, as we saw in the last chapter, Atalanta in Calydon was written at the side of the Sapphic muse Gordon as she composed her flagellation novel, The Children of the Chapel. These poems set the scene, as it were, for the emergence of other Sapphic doppelgangers, the female Greek deities of “At Eleusis”, “Hymn to Proserpine” and “The Garden of Proserpine”. These sexualised goddesses are, in their way, forms of the Sapphic dominatrix, all-powerful and without pity.<sup>19</sup> They emerge from the darkness of the Ancient World and in the shared landscape of their Greekness, they reinforce her presence.

The Greek Sappho is one embodiment, but there are other more vivid forms that had a particular resonance for Swinburne, and indeed for his readers. As we saw in the last chapter, Swinburne’s imitations of PreRaphaelite verse were unsuccessful, but the images of their paintings, I argue, had a much greater impact, and enabled him to envisage and embody different constructs of Sappho and to underpin Poems and Ballads: 1 with PreRaphaelite reference. To continue the earlier analogy of sleuthing, we might look on the artists below as providing their own individual identikit of Sappho which act as an aid to discovering her actual presence within Poems and Ballads: 1. I consider how the painted bodies of Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Simeon Solomon and James McNeil Whistler exhibit themselves in the volume. I begin with Simeon Solomon and the androgynous Sapphic Body.

In “A Touch of Sappho” Simon Goldhill comments on Sappho and Erinna in a Garden at Mytilene (1864): “...this painting functions as a visual instantiation – an illustration almost – of Swinburne’s notorious poem “Anactoria””(Martindale 263). Indeed it is tempting to reverse this comment and make “Anactoria” the translation of the picture, since lines from the poem seem to describe Swinburne’s own comments on it “Breast kindle breast, and either burn one hour”, might form a description of “the clinging arms and labouring lips” of “Mytilenian Sappho” (CW 15: 451). Even “the leavings of lilies in thy hair, and “the bruised blossoms” could be seen as a

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<sup>19</sup> “At Eleusis” shows the indifference of Demeter to human suffering: “I shut up the body and sweet mouth / Of all soft pasture and the tender land.” Proserpine “gathers all things mortal / With cold immortal hands.” We might add the cruel Venus of “Laus Veneris” since the Roman Venus is interchangeable with the Greek Aphrodite.

response to the painting. However, this is a dangerous reading since it would seem that these lines were written *before* the picture was painted. It is, of course, possible that there were earlier sketches or versions that enhanced Swinburne's realisation of Anactoria, but this can only be a matter of speculation. Solomon's real contribution was to enliven the androgynous Sappho (exemplified in his 1862 Study of Sappho) and Swinburne's comments on Solomon's depictions of other androgynous figures, describe a particular Sapphic juxtaposition of antonyms: "In the features of these groups...we see the latent relations of pain and pleasure, and the subtle conspiracies of good with evil, the deep alliances of death and life, love and hate, of attraction and of abhorrence"(CW 14: 455). And we can see these antonyms emerging in the poem "Erotion" written in response to a picture of Solomon's (now lost); for example: "Shall not some memory of his breath / Lie sweet on lips that touch the lips of death?"; "I shall remember while the light lives yet"; "I shall be glad of thee, O fairest head, / Alive, alone, without thee, with thee, dead."<sup>20</sup> This juxtaposition of opposites is embodied in poems concerned with androgyny, for example, in "Hermaphroditus": "Love stands upon thy left hand and thy right", and they also have specific Sapphic links. Maxwell points to the echoing of fragment 130 at the end of "Fragoletta": "Oh bitterness of things too sweet" (212), and the poem also draws from Latouche's Sapphic novel, of that name. These figures resurface throughout the volume and act as links in a chain of androgyny leading back to the Ancient concept of "mascula" Sappho.

Poems and Ballads:1 is dedicated "To my friend Edward Burne-Jones", "affectionately and admiringly", (the poem that accompanies the dedication will be fully discussed in the following chapter). The dedication suggests that the painter had a particular influence in the volume, and the most obvious connection is through the picture Laus Veneris. Discussion of its impact on Swinburne's poem of the same name is tricky because the painting was completed between

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<sup>20</sup> Lafourcade writes: "*Anactoria*: manuscript d écrit par E. Gosse; filigrane 1863; moins les vers 155-189, composes sans doute en 1865 "(LJ2: 422). "*Anactoria*": handwritten manuscript provided by E. Gosse, water-marked 1863 without verses 155-189, doubtless composed in 1865.

<sup>20</sup> Robert A. Greenberg comments on the Sapphic nature of the poem: "As he had done in the "Anactoria", the modern poet [Swinburne] submits himself to Sappho's spirit interpreting and enlarging upon her emotions and arguments by integrating his own words with Sapphic lines and phrases" ("Erotion", 'Anactoria' and the Sapphic Passion" 81).

1873-8 and was not exhibited until 1878. However, Burne-Jones had attempted an earlier watercolour version in 1861, and Swinburne's poem was composed in 1862, a time when he was particularly close to the painter, so one can assume a cross-fertilisation of ideas on the subject.<sup>21</sup> Parris comments, "Burne-Jones' choice of subject is so Swinburnean that poem and picture were clearly twin expressions of shared ideas, a fact reflected in the dedication of Poems and Ballads to Burne-Jones" (230). But how does this picture, apparently about Venus, relate to Sappho? How does the picture inform Sappho's appearance in Poems and Ballads: 1?

The wall-hanging that acts as a backdrop to the picture, suggests a Sapphic ambience since it depicts Venus' chariot with its doves described in fragment 1: "beautiful swift sparrows that bring Aphrodite to earth in her "yoked chariot, and which is re-iterated by Swinburne in "Sapphics" as "the straining plumes of doves that drew her."<sup>22</sup> Then the prominent positioning of Venus' stringed instrument calls to mind the many depictions of Sappho with the lyre (see Chapter 1); while its suggestive positioning recalls Swinburne's own comment: "[Sappho] might have sung and played to children with the same mouth and the same hand which made music on the Lesbian lyre, and on another female organ not necessary to specify" (Lang: 2: 101). The depiction of Venus and her women glances at Sappho's role as a teacher of amorous arts: one "pupil" idly turns the pages of a book, another holds a pen, but does not write, and their "labours" are overshadowed by the activities of Venus and Cupid above them.<sup>23</sup> There is a languid hot-house atmosphere about the scene which Swinburne echoes in "Laus Veneris" when he describes Venus' horsel:

Her gateways smoke with fume of flowers and fires,  
With loves burnt out and unassuaged desires;

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<sup>21</sup> Georgiana Burne-Jones comments, "Sometimes twice or three times a day he would come in, bringing his poems hot from the heart and certain of welcome or a hearing at any hour" (1: 215).

<sup>22</sup> See also Fragment 42.

<sup>23</sup> "quid nisi cum multo, venerem confundere vino./ praecepit lyrici teia musa senis/ Lesbia quid docuit Sappho, nisi amare puellas?" (Ovid Tristia 2:363-5; Campbell 42-43)

"What instructions, except how to mingle love with much wine, did the Teian muse of the old lyric poet give? What did Sappho of Lesbos teach her girls, except how to love?"

Between her lips the steam of them is sweet,

The languor in her ears of many lyres.

Perhaps the greatest impact of Burne-Jones' picture, on Poems and Ballads:1 was to suggest the conflation of Sappho with Venus, one that Swinburne would see in Titian: "...as for Titian's Venus – Sappho and Anactoria in one.... I think Tannhäuser need not have been bored to the end of the world..." (B.M. MS.L.R. 26a, f.15; Henderson 80-81). And indeed, in the poem "Laus Veneris" we see Tannhäuser prepared to be distinctly un-bored in his mistress' horsel: "I seal myself upon thee with my might, / Abiding away out of all men's sight / Until God loosen over sea and land / The thunder of the trumpets of the night." As signifier of erotic dominance Venus becomes a construct of Sappho, and when Venus is mentioned later in "The Hymn to Proserpine", or indeed re-read earlier in "Ballad of Death", we read the presence of Sappho.

But Sappho is labile. The androgynous Sappho again makes herself felt. Elizabeth Gitter comments, "Swinburne's ladies of torture are at times so powerfully phallic that they become androgynous" ("The Power of Women's Hair" 952). Such an androgyne can be seen in "Laus Veneris": although the avatar of female beauty Venus (with her Sapphic connotations) has taken on herself the role of the male warrior: "she tramples all that winepress of the dead"; "yea, all she slayeth." In Beauty's Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism Kathy Psomiades draws attention to the comments of the critic Frederick Wedmore on Burne-Jones depiction of Venus: "...and then the hips narrow and straight are an exaggeration of a beauty which Greek art recognised – a *beauty in which the one sex was not very far removed from the other, here they are together and identical*" (emphasis added). She continues: "Like Swinburne's poem, his reading of the painting implies a division between the world in which genders are separated and the world in which Venus horribly combines aspects of male and female" (91). We have already seen how Solomon enabled an androgynous Sappho within the volume, and now Burne-Jones depiction of Venus acted as yet another inspiration for the embodiment of her, a "mascula Sappho" who appears most vividly in "Faustine", casting aside her femininity and enjoying the violence of the male world: "the games men played with death." Like Sappho herself, these dominatrices have labile gender.

In 1859 Rossetti had started on a series of paintings of beautiful women who might also be described as erotic dominatrices, and I suggest that Bocca Baciata (1860) can also be seen in “Faustine”: there is the same emphasis on the prominent shoulder: “with its fleece / Of locks,” and throat: “Strong, heavy, throwing out the face / And hard bright chin / And shameful scornful lips.” And Rossetti’s Lucretia Borgia (1860-1) emerged from Chronicle of Tebaldeo Tebaldei to reappears in “A Ballad of Life”: “Borgia, thy gold hair burns in me, / Thy mouth makes beat my blood in feverish rhymes.” Such pictures inspired and embodied Swinburne’s Sapphic dominatrix and her appearance in Poems and Ballads: 1. During his visit to Florence in 1864, Swinburne was further struck by various depictions of dominatrices defined by their serpentine attributes, for example in his “Notes on Designs of the Old Masters at Florence” he describes a drawing of a dominatrix by Filippino Lippi which he references back to Burne Jones’ Sidonia von Bork (1860): “Especially will she recall the heroine of Meinhold to those who have seen Mr E. Burne-Jones nobler drawing of the young Sidonia wearing a gown whose pattern is of branching *knotted snakes*, black upon gold stuff”(emphasis added: CW15: 169). On an (unspecified) study by Michelangelo he comments:

...her hair close and curled seems ready to shudder in sunder and divide into snakes...her mouth crueller than a tiger’s, colder than a snake’s, and beautiful beyond a woman’s, she is the deadlier Venus incarnate: for upon earth also many names might be found for here found for her; Lamia re-transformed invested now with a fuller beauty but divested of all feminine attributes not native to the snake.... (CW15: 169).

This serpentine adjunct of the metamorphosing dominatrix again leads to Sappho. Swinburne refers to another study of a head by Michelangelo which he reads as Cleopatra: “the serpentine hair is drawn up into a tuft at the crown with two ringlets hanging, heavy and deadly as small tired snakes. He continues to compare this depiction with “the loveliest passage of ‘Salamambo’, a mystic marriage between the maiden body and the scaly coils of the serpent” (CW15: 161). But Balzac’s snake-loving Salamambo had emerged from the pages of contemporary *Sapphic*

literature. The snake woman conflates with the Sapphic dominatrix. We can see her in operation in “Hesperia”:

... her mouth growing cruel,  
And flushed as with wine with the blood of her lovers,  
Our Lady of Pain.  
Low down where the thicket is thicker with thorns than  
with leaves in the Summer,  
In the brake is a gleaming of eyes and a hissing of  
tongues that I knew;  
And the lithe long throats of her snakes reach round her,  
their mouths overcome her,  
And her lips grow cruel with their foam, made moist  
as a desert with dew.  
With the thirst and the hunger of lust though her beau-  
tiful lips be so bitter,  
With the cold foul foam of the snakes they soften and  
redden and smile...

In these lines the dominatrix, both surrounded by snakes and a snake herself, acts to conflate such dominatrices as Lamia and Cleopatra and brings them into Swinburne’s own serpentarium. We can descry a glimpse of the early dominatrix, Gordon through an echoing of “Hide and Seek”: the lines “Low down where the thicket is thicker with thorns than / With leaves in the Summer, / In the brake is a gleaming of eyes and a hissing of tongues that I knew....” surely echo: “There she crouched beside the whispering river, / Deep in the deep flags round the wild coot’s nest, / Round her the reeds kept a low and windy shiver.” Gordon, as we have seen, was one version of the Sapphic dominatrix, but the words, “Our Lady of Pain” add another, the later Eton Metre Mistress. The line: “The lithe long throats of her snakes [that] reach round her”

recalls Sappho's own description of eros as "a crawling insinuating creature" (Fragment 130). Sappho, through the power of her erotic verse that cobra-like "strikes and stings", is a dominatrix defined by serpentine properties.<sup>24</sup>

James McNeil Whistler enabled a rather different Sapphic embodiment.<sup>25</sup> His Little White Girl, (1865), later known as Symphony in White no.2 prompted "Before the Mirror", which bears the subscription "Verses written under a picture", and "Inscribed to J.A. Whistler". Swinburne himself wrote to Whistler, "I know it was entirely and only suggested to me by the picture" (Lang 1: 118-119). But, as Maxwell points out the poem does not transcribe the picture. She comments: "...the poet selectively fastens on a few details – the rather wistful air of the picture, the theme of whiteness and the flowers - which he then adjusts to suit his own purposes" (Swinburne 31-32). I see these selections as indications of Sapphic appearance. The wistfulness transcribes Sapphic *ποθος* while the woman's musings are redolent with Sapphic tropes, for example memory and forgetting: "old loves and faded fears"; the juxtaposition of the antonyms, pleasure and pain: "Is joy thy dower or grief?"; life and death: "Art thou the ghost, my sister, / White sister there, / Am I the ghost, who knows?" The (nine) references to flowers reflect Sappho's own frequent floral references.<sup>26</sup> Like Sappho herself, the woman in the mirror is ambiguous, a shadowy creature of doubtful virtue, "A late rose whose life is brief..." who resembles "the hyacinth which shepherds trample underfoot (Fragment 105c). When it was exhibited again in 1872 at the South Kensington Museum the reviewer of "The Times" found Swinburne's accompanying verses "very beautiful but not very lucid" (14<sup>th</sup> May 1872). In fact, it is this lack of lucidity, this lability that indicates Sappho, she too is: "Before the veil forbidden

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<sup>24</sup> For example, in "Faustine" the poet asks: "What adders came to shed their coats / What coiled obscene / Small serpents with soft stretching throats / Caressed Faustine?" Félice becomes "my snake with bright bland eyes, my snake / Grown tame and glad to be caressed." In "The Two Dreams" we are told: "her mouth caught like a snake's mouth, and stung..."

<sup>25</sup> Swinburne met Whistler in 1863. Whistler was responsible for a number of Sapphic links; they had a common interest in contemporary French literature, and it was in his company that Swinburne went to Paris in that year, and subsequently composed "Hermaphroditus", thereby combining his admiration for Gautier's "Contralto" with his viewing of the statue in the Louvre, and echoing Sappho's sexual lability. Whistler also took him to the studio of Fantin-Latour, where he saw a sketch of Tannhäuser in the Venusberg.

<sup>26</sup> For example: fragments 2, 55, 81, 105c, 122 125, 132.



/ Shut up from sight.” The whiteness of the girl in Whistler’s painting translates into Sappho’s “lost white feverish limbs”; with her “face fallen and white throat lifted” she is the embodiment of Sappho whose face is described in “The Masque of Queen Bersabe” as “pale like faded fire”, a ghostly figure who must be admired in death as in life. Swinburne’s comments on Whistler’s picture define this particular Sapphic construct: “. . .the notion of sad and glad mystery in the face languidly contemplative of its own phantom, and all other things seen by phantoms” (Lang 1:1200).

In this section I have tried to show how various artists influenced Swinburne and enabled him to reveal different embodiments of Sappho in forms that are not immediately obvious: through Solomon, Swinburne could identify a Sappho who was variously lesbian, Greek, and most significantly androgynous; from Rossetti came more modern metamorphosing depictions of the dominatrix while Burne-Jones contributed further complementary forms of the dominatrix with the addition of the snake, a motif identified in Florentine painting and associated with Sappho; he also offered another instance of the androgynous Sappho and additionally conflated Sappho with Venus. From Whistler came a labile Sappho whose form hovered ghostly between life and death.

I now turn to a rather different mode of embodiment, one which I term the Holy Dominatrix and I look at this particular Sapphic manifestation in three apparently religious poems: “A Christmas Carol”; “Madonna Mia” and “St Dorothy”. I shall argue that these poems are not, in fact, Christian poems, but present images of the dominatrix perhaps more vivid than those we have already seen.

“A Christmas Carol” is not in any sense a “religious” poem. In the first place, it is a response to a drawing by Rossetti. Secondly, our suspicions are immediately aroused by the mention of the Virgin Mary, since she has not had a good press hitherto in the volume: she has been compared unfavourably to Venus in “Hymn to Proserpine”: “For thine came pale and a virgin, and sister to sorrow; / But ours / Her deep hair heavily laden with odour and colour of flowers”; and in “Dolores”, she reappears as “Our Lady of Pain”, with “lips full of lust and of laughter.” We are

then, surprised to find her re-appearing apparently in her conventional form. The poem takes the form of a song sung by a queen attended at her toilet by three handmaidens who are engaged in dressing her hair. When the queen then addresses the Virgin, i.e. embarks upon the carol, the two women become sort of clones of each other: the Virgin Mary is equally luxuriously attended by three women, one of whom is, significantly, Mary Magdalene. The nativity certainly does not feature a humble birth; the Christ child is merely pictured as an accessory, a part of a reflective luxuriance enjoyed by the eroticised woman singing the carol: “He had two handmaids at his head, / One handmaid at his feet.” Our attention is drawn, not to Mary’s virginity, but to her covert sexual activity:

When she sat at Joseph’s hand,  
She looked against her side:  
And either way from the short silk band  
Her girdle was all wried.

The word “wried” suggests to us a sexual interference, and the expression “looked against her side” suggests the sidelong glance of a guilty conscience. And we are not alone in our suspicions: Joseph is certainly concerned about aberrant behaviour that have resulted in illegitimate birth:

If the child be some other man’s  
And if it be none of mine,  
The manger shall be straw two spans,  
Betwixen kine and kine.

This “virgin” may well be “Mary who is most wise”, but we cannot escape our memory of Dolores who was also “...wise among women and wisest, / Our lady of Pain.” In her discussion of the Romantics in *Sappho and the Virgin Mary*, Ruth Vanita argues that Marian ideas and images intersect with those of Sappho, “to aspire towards a new Eden or new Jerusalem – a revolutionary idea of community – in Romantic texts” (106). Swinburne interest in such

intersections is rather different, he chooses to valorise the Sapphic role, showing how it invades and subverts the Marian. “Madonna Mia” is a case in point: we are told “God gave her might and mirth / And laid his whole sweet earth / Between her hands”, which suggests this Madonna is the Virgin Mary, but through the echoing of the chosen erogenous zone, the eyelid, she also recalls the Venus of “Laus Veneris”: “Beneath her eyelids deep / Love lying, seems asleep” echoes the trope in “Laus Veneris”: “her eyelids are so peaceable.” She also recalls Lucrezia Borgia in “The Ballad of Death” since both are shrouded by sinister hoods indicating death.<sup>27</sup>

Like Lucrezia Borgia in “A Ballad of Life” who is met “in a place of wind and flowers,” the Virgin Mary is an example of the aberrant female presence who exhibits herself in a kind of subverted “hortus conclusus”: “Under green apple-boughs / That never a storm will rouse / My lady hath her house / Between two bowers.”<sup>28</sup> Swinburne was well aware of such subversions from his visit to Florence and commented somewhat ironically: “of Francia there is one example, pretty enough if also petty; a virgin and child among flowering rose-beds.”(CW 15: 179). He added later, more enthusiastically: “I saw many of Andrea’s studies of figure; first a sketch of Lucrezia, seated with legs bare...in a larger drawing she is naked and holds a child; sitting, as I presume, for the appropriate part of the virgin” (194).

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<sup>27</sup> See the references to hoods in the following:  
By night there stood against my bed  
Queen Venus with a hood striped gold and black  
Both sides drawn fully back  
From brows wherein the sad blood failed of red,  
And temples drained of purple and full of death. (“A Ballad of Death”)

She hath no more to wear  
But one white hood of vair  
Drawn over eyes and hair  
Made for some great queen’s head,  
Some fair great queen since dead. (“Madonna Mia”)

<sup>28</sup> “Mary is at one and the same time the bride and the garden, and she is placed in the circular or more often square garden whose wall or wattle fence is furnished with a gate. Moreover she is surrounded with a number of emblems taken mostly from the descriptive passages in the Song of Solomon, or other passages in the Bible that indicate her immaculate state”(Gotfredsen 51).

Both these poems, then, must be read in the context of the other subverted madonnas: Dolores, Venus or Lucrezia Borgia, who are, in turn, metamorphosing constructs of the Sapphic dominatrix who may easily take upon herself the form of a “wried” virgin. This presence may be seen in the third “devotional” poem.

In “St Dorothy” the saint is introduced in the context of flagellation: “From her least years, that seeing her school-fellows / That read beside her stricken with a rod, / She would cry full sore...” The poem continues by describing the stages by which her desire for martyrdom turns her into a construct of the cruel dominatrix who chooses to indulge in sadomasochism; by her refusal to sacrifice to Venus, she sets in motion three acts of violence: her own execution, Gabalus’ murder and Theophilus’ hanging. St Dorothy is a dominatrix who pays the ultimate price for sadomasochistic indulgence; and even after death exacts further punishment, an act of necrophilia by Theophile, “But in his face his lady’s face is sweet, / And through his lips her kissing lips are gone.” This apparently conventional eulogy of a Christian martyr actually invites us to view her as the antithesis of saintly womanhood, an agent of aberrance, intimately connected with sadism, masochism and necrophilia. She is even more threatening than the Sappho of “Anactoria” since this latter only states her potentiality for violence: “I would my love could kill thee”, Dorothy has no such compunction: “...this death and all this pain / I take in penance of my bitter sins.”

In this chapter we have looked at different footprints, footsteps and embodiments of Sappho which would have been readily discernible to the educated Victorian reader as unmistakably Sapphic: her name, her metre, her fragments, her tropes and her very Greekness all proclaim her presence. We have also seen a number of embodiments of Sappho that had grown out of Swinburne’s own cherished constructs of Sappho and there is one last instance of Sapphic presence, that is also peculiarly Swinburne’s own, and which has not yet been fully explored, but perhaps speaks of Sappho’s embodiment more strongly than any other: the identification of Sappho with the sea.

In the last chapter we saw how the sea with its various associations had early introduced Swinburne to constructs that he would later identify as Sapphic and that he had later, through various experiences, come to identify the sea with Sappho, and Sappho with the sea, and that factors a, b and c acted on him through the sea, through Sappho and through a conflation of them both. And Poems and Ballads: 1 will become an expression of this conflation. Reference to the sea ebbs and flows throughout the volume and when mention is made of the sea, it necessarily brings Sapphic complex associations with it.<sup>29</sup> There are, of course, obvious Sapphic references associated with the sea, with which Swinburne draws attention to Sappho: her legendary drowning is recalled in “the lost white limbs / Of the Lesbian Sappho adrift” in “*Satia Te Sanguine*”, (a reference which may, additionally, reflect two events in Swinburne’s own life, the death of his friend George Rankin Luke and Lizzie Siddall’s tragic suicide).<sup>30</sup> The poem “*Les Noyades*” has an obvious parallel with Sappho’s death. We can compare the binding together of “maidens and young men, naked and wed” and the subsequent casting of the bound bodies into the waters of the River Loire “that would have driven us down to the sea”, with “this Sappho [who]leapt from the cliff of Leucates and drowned herself for love of Phaon the Mytilenean” (Campbell 7- 8).<sup>31</sup> Like the Sapphic legend, the poem conflates drowning with the erotic: “We should yield, go down, locked hands and feet / Die, drown together, and breath catch breath.” We can perhaps, also see here a reflection of Swinburne’s early childhood experience when he was held up naked in his father’s arms and brandished between his hands “before being shot like a stone from a sling through the air” (Lang 3:12).

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<sup>29</sup> The sea plays a part in the following; “*Phaedra*”, “*The Triumph of Time*”, “*Les Noyades*”, “*Itylus*”, “*Anactoria*”, “*Hymn to Proserpine*”, “*Illicit*”, “*Satia Te Sanguine*”, “*A lamentation*”, “*Rondel*”, “*In Memory of Walter Savage Landor*”, “*A Song in the Time of Order*” “*To “Victor Hugo*”, “*Dolores*”, the “*The Garden of Proserpine*”, “*Hesperia*”, “*Love at Sea*”, “*Felise*”, “*Hendecasyllabics*”, “*Sapphics*”, “*May Janet*” and “*Dedication*”.

<sup>30</sup> George Rankin Luke, a founder member of “*Old Mortality*”, the Oxford society to which Swinburne belonged, died in a mysterious drowning accident in the Isis in 1862. Lizzie Siddall’s suicide must have brought to mind her earlier painful pose as the drowned Ophelia in John Millais’ picture of that name (1851-2).

<sup>31</sup> The trope of binding has further Sapphic connections: “... the judge bade strip and ship them, and bind / Bosom to bosom, to drown and die.” Sappho too remembers how her beloved was bound: “and round your tender neck you put many woven garlands made from flowers...” ( Fragment 94). The purpose of each binding was erotic satisfaction.

While Swinburne's sea reference may refer to Sappho's life and rehearse their commonality of experience (factor a), it also re-enacts Swinburne's own Sapphic constructs. In "Phaedra" she is a death-giving dominatrix with "roaring reefs"; in "Anactoria" she is a signifier of lyric "violently singing"; she is a reminder of flagellation as she "throbs, trembling under beam and breeze" ("Félise"); in "Hymn to Proserpine" she signifies sexuality, emerging as Venus "flushed from the full-flushed wave." In all these instances she re-enacts factor b) the sublime.

However, it is in "The Triumph of Time" written after Swinburne's rejection by Gordon, that this conflation of Sappho and the sea assumes its greatest importance, and where we see Sappho's supremacy asserted absolutely and her possession of the poet celebrated. He acknowledges the loss of Gordon: "I have put days and dreams out of mind, / Days that are over, dreams that are done", and he admits the impossibility of an *actual* sexual identity: "It will not grow again, this fruit of my heart." As Henderson comments: "The news that he was to lose Mary was evidently a calamity which, in his view, precluded the idea of marriage to anyone else – that he saw it as his last and only chance of achieving a relative sexual normality" (87). However, he has admitted "Earth is not spoilt for a single shower", as always, Sappho was at hand. Swinburne knows what he must do: "I will go back to the great sweet mother, / Mother and lover of men, the sea." As he had sought Sappho in the form of the mother in the Culver Cliff incident, now he must seek her again, both as factor a) the familiar, and factor c) the refuge. She is "the great sweet mother", "fair white mother", "fair green girdled mother of mine", "mother of loves", "mother of mutable winds", "mother of loves and hours", it is she who will "save me and hide me in all thy waves". On the other hand, through her lability she can deny her motherhood and become "a barren mother" one who as Ovid tells us lacks a "pignus amantis", a child as pledge of Phaon's love (Heroides 15: 103-4), and she can thus share her own sterility with Swinburne, now he too is "barren stock". However, this maternal figure rising from the incestuous ambience of East Dene, metamorphoses yet again into the glittering other, factor b) and offers a sublime that he had found in his childhood swimming, as he expresses his desire to "cling to her, strive with her" and to enjoy "thy sweet hard kisses [that are] are strong like wine." As at Eton, the sublime is offered by the dominatrix who will again, act both as refuge and surrogate sexual partner: as refuge he may "go down, close with her, kiss her and

mix her with me.” But she is also the metre mistress, one whose “large embraces [are] keen like pain.” This many-faceted Sappho arising from the sea like Venus, “flushed from the full-flushed wave, and imperial,” is now his chosen muse and mistress to whom he will submit and achieve an alternative tumescence: “I shall rise with thy rising, with thee subside.” In a poem infused with Sappho’s own tropes of longing and memory (see above), he acknowledges his possession by her. As Prins comments: “The analogy between Swinburne’s metrical virtuosity and “the rhythmical science of the sea” serves to naturalise the rhythm of his poetry; Swinburne now seems to dissolve into a larger force of nature, just as Sappho dissolves into a Sapphic rhythm” (165).

### **Backtracking**

In this chapter I have tried to “track down” Sappho’s body or bodies and show her omnipresence in Poems and Ballads: 1 I have also aimed to show how her appearances in the volume refract the process of Sapphic possession. To this end I looked at what I termed “Sapphic footprints”, her name, her metres (with all their Eton associations), her fragments and her tropes. I explored poems which were apparently without Sapphic reference and identified Sappho within them. Then I looked at how Swinburne’s personal images of Sappho became embodied and embedded in the verse through the influence of the PreRaphaelites and other artists to underscore constructs of other Sapphic personae: the Greek, the androgyne and the dominatrix. Lastly, I considered how reference to the sea reinforced and proclaimed Sappho’s presence throughout the volume.

My other aim in this chapter has been to show how this refraction of Sapphic possession has asserted particular constructs. If we now consider the volume as a whole, we can see there are four significant constructs around which other constructs cluster and that they act to form the bedrock of the verse: Aberrance, the Greek, Lability and Fracture. I briefly summarise them below.

Aberrance has been indicated by various forms of the Sapphic dominatrix: the cruel woman, the phallic woman, the lesbian, the androgyne, the incestuous woman; the masochistic woman, the sadistic woman, the ghost woman and the antithetical Virgin. The following poems contain these constructs. I do not list the different forms separately because there is so much overlap between them:

“Laus Veneris”; “A Ballad of Life”; “A Ballad of Death”; “Laus Veneris” “Phaedra”; “The Triumph of Time”; “Les Noyades”; “Itylus”; “Anactoria”; “Hymn to Proserpine”; “Hermaphroditus”; “Fragoletta”; “Satia Te Sanguine”; “Faustine”; “The Leper”; “The Garden of Proserpine”; “Hesperia”; “At Eleusis”; “A Christmas Carol”; “The Masque of Queen Bersabe”; “St Dorothy”; “Aholibah”; “Madonna Mia”; “The King’s Daughter”; “The Bloody Son”; “The Sea Swallows”.

As we have seen, Sappho becomes a signifier of the Greek through the mimicking of Classical metre, particularly in “Hendecasyllabics” and “Sapphics”; but we also saw her appearing as a signifier of the unmentionable side of the Classics in the form of dominatrices from the Ancient World in the following: “Laus Veneris” “Phaedra”; “Itylus”; “Anactoria”; “Hymn to Proserpine”; “Faustine”; “The Garden of Proserpine”; “At Eleusis”; “The Masque of Queen Bersabe”; while “Hermaphroditus”, “Fragoletta” and “Erotion” explore ideas of androgyny that find their roots in the Ancient World. We also saw how apparently unrelated mentions of the Greek could proclaim a Sapphic presence in the poems in “A Litany” and “A Lamentation.”

Sappho’s labile nature became apparent in a number of ways: through the exchanging of one construct for another, in particular through the juxtaposition of Sapphic antonyms: Absence/Presence; Memory/Forgetting; Eros/Thanatos. It can be particularly seen in the metamorphosing constructs of aberrant women and in different forms of labile sexuality mentioned above. Indeed, the metamorphosing presences of a labile Sappho are so widespread, that a case could be made for every poem in the volume containing elements of Sapphic lability, and for that reason I do not attempt to list them.



We have seen Sapphic fracture in Swinburne's intertextualising and echoing of Sappho's fragments; in the employment of metre and rhythm; and the implicit fracture that is offered by the dominatrix in the depiction of sadomasochism, cruelty and violence. Sapphic fracture has been seen in the aping of particular tropes of fracture in Sappho's verse. Again, a case could be made out for almost every poem containing some sort of fracturing, but the following include particularly obvious examples: "Anactoria"; "Satia te Sanguine"; "A Match"; "An Interlude"; "Rococo"; "Hendecasyllabics"; "Sapphics"; "Dedication."

An inventory of Sapphic constructs detailing Aberrance, the Greek, Lability and Fracture, while interesting in itself, is extremely reductive since it tells us little about the role of the poet, the nature of his verse or its effect on its readers. The purpose of the following chapters is to show how such constructs describe a Sapphic muse who will inspire and enable a particular and provocative poetics.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**THE TRIUMPH OF THE MUSE**

“...utterly and miserably lost to the muses.”

Robert Buchanan

“Libidinous poet of a band of satyrs.”

John Morley <sup>1</sup>

In the last chapter I discussed how the omnipresence of Sappho in Poems and Ballads: 1 refracted Swinburne’s own experience and preoccupations; we also saw how the volume fore fronted particular constructs of Sappho. However, it is obvious that Poems and Ballads: 1 is more than a reflection of Swinburne’s own sexual anxieties and it is more than an inventory of Sapphic interventions. Something has happened to the poet that has enabled him to turn a list of sexual preoccupations into exquisite lyric. What has enabled him to do this? Who has performed this magic? Obviously it must somehow relate to the Sapphic presence, but to call it a presence is not enough, for in our consideration of Sappho’s constructs there has always been the paramount underlying construct of lyric, along with a tacit acceptance that her lyrical persona is inextricably linked with her various sexual personae; it is, then, quite wrong (although in the complexity of disentangling her various sexual constructs I have sometimes been constrained to do so), to consider Sappho in any way other than as a muse, for in the expression of all her constructs (by whatever artist, in whatever form) we see her performing this role: one who inspires and enables. It is this Sapphic muse with which the chapter is concerned.

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<sup>1</sup> The first quotation is from Robert Buchanan’s article in the Athenaeum (August 1866, in Hyder, CH 31). The second is from John Morley’s article in the Saturday Review (4th August 1866, in Hyder, CH 29). Both are discussed later in the chapter.

My aim in this chapter is twofold: a) to examine the nature of the muse who has emerged from the process of Sapphic possession and who has come to play such a significant part in Poems and Ballads: 1; b) to examine the effect on the poet of a muse who not only inspires and enables, but who, through her dominatrical persona possesses a particular terrifying agency of her own.

I shall use Freudian psychology to read this muse in the form of libido emanating from Swinburne's id, and I shall look on Poems and Ballads: 1 as a topos where the muse and the poet encounter each other to turn the libido into verse. My aim is to show a painful process analogous to Sapphic possession whereby the muse gains supremacy over the poet. In other words, I shall argue that this is verse which owes more to the libido and the unconscious than to the rationality of the ego. I argue further that this libido (eros) becomes intertwined with the death instinct, whose intent is to bring about the poet's metaphorical demise, and which finally reduces the poet to a state where his sentient being is so totally absorbed, that he functions solely as mouthpiece of the Sapphic muse and her constructs.

### **The Nature of the Sapphic Muse**

We have seen how Swinburne came to be possessed by the idea of Sappho and that this possession was made manifest in Poems and Ballads: 1 by an overwhelming Sapphic presence that we can define as his muse. But what exactly is this muse and how does she operate on the poet? In order to identify her nature I start by looking at an association made by Mary K. Deshazer between the muse and the myth of Orpheus; in view of Sappho's Greekness this would seem an appropriate point from which to begin:

The Orphic saga also contains the seeds of three major "categories" of imagery in which the muse through the ages has been portrayed: the sexual category seen in Orpheus' desire to possess Eurydice, yet his inability or unwillingness to curb his passion, even at the risk of losing her; the spiritual category, symbolized by Orpheus' journey to and from Hades, his negotiations with the gods, and Eurydice's transformation from mortal to divine woman; and the natural category, seen in

Orpheus' ability to quiet "all beasts, all birds, all stones" with the spell of his mesmerizing song – music whose power stems from the poet's lament for a muse – like woman closely associated with nature. (Inspiring Women: Re-imagining the Muse 19-20)

This description drawing from the figure of Orpheus has particular relevance to Sappho since, as Maxwell points out "Sappho is the rightful inheritor of Orpheus...endorsed by Classical tradition" (31).<sup>2</sup> In the poem "On The Cliffs" Swinburne will show how Sappho satisfies all these criteria as "soul triune, woman and god and bird": as "woman" she satisfies the sexual category, as "bird" the natural, and as "god", the spiritual. However, there is none of the impersonality implicit in Deshazer's definition, in the poem Swinburne asserts Sappho belongs to him, or rather, that he belongs to her: "I have known thee and loved." So how will this muse operate in Poems and Ballads: 1? Let us look first at the "Natural".

Can Swinburne's muse be somehow identified with the Romantic view of the force of Nature? Can she for example, be identified with the Wordsworthian muse described by Margaret Homans in her chapter "The Masculine Tradition": "Mother nature is the necessary complement to his imaginative project.... But he views her with a son's mixture of devoted love and resistance to the constraints she would place on his imaginative freedom.... She is no more than what he allows her to be" (Women Writers and Poetic Identity 13). In other words she constitutes a fond maternal figure, ready to nourish and indulge "her son", the poet, when invoked by him. Certainly Sappho has a valid claim to fond maternity since she has revealed herself as a loving mother (Fragment 132), and, as we saw in the last chapter, Swinburne associates Sappho with the maternal presence of the sea: in "The Triumph of Time" she is, in turn, "the mother of loves"; "mother of mutable winds and hours"; "the great sweet mother"; a fair white mother; a "fair green-girdled mother". But a closer examination reveals a very skewed form of mothering indeed: she is revealed as "a barren mother" and "a mother-maid"; she is an incestuous mother with whom the poet enjoys an oedipal relationship: "I will go down to her, I and none other / Close with her, kiss her and mix her with me." She is synonymous with cruelty:

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<sup>2</sup> Maxwell usefully cites various references (227-228).

her “large embraces are keen like pain”; it is she who is responsible for death in “those pure cold populous graves.” And indeed, for Swinburne Nature represented the supreme cruelty. In “William Blake”, he paraphrases de Sade and declares: “Nature averse to crime? I tell you Nature lives and breathes by it; hungers at all her pores for bloodshed, aches in all her nerves for the help of sin, yearns with all her heart for the furtherance of cruelty” (CW 16: 202). Indeed, as we saw in the last chapter her blind cruelty is commemorated in “A Lamentation”: “Who hath known the pain, the old pain of earth / Or all the travail of the sea, / The many ways and waves, the birth / Fruitless?” or again in “A Litany”: “All the bright lights of heaven / I will make dark over thee.” If the Sapphic muse is to be associated with Nature, she is certainly no fond maternal presence, but an avatar of cruelty; she will belong to that class of Swinburne’s favourite women, the dominatrix, and as woman she will constitute a rather different form of muse from that of the poet’s traditional beloved.

In the last chapter when we looked at instances of Sapphic presence, we repeatedly returned to the dominatrix, a figure which came to signify Sappho herself. But does this trope transfer and equate with the idea of the muse? Certainly it does not equate with Penelope Murray’s definition of the traditionally perceived muse: “the poet objectifies his source of inspiration as a *passive female figure*, while simultaneously appropriating her creative powers and *silencing her* in the process” (“Reclaiming the muse” 341; emphasis added). This definition privileges the poet over the muse, but Swinburne’s possession by Sappho has made *him* the passive figure, and I shall be arguing for a process directly opposed to Murray’s description, and show that it is not the muse that is silenced, but the poet. This is clearly a very powerful muse, but what is the source of her power?

The Sapphic muse has attributes that will set her apart from the conventional idea of the muse: there is something about her that is violent and aberrant and sexual. Let us look more closely at this dominatrix/muse. In The Romantic Agony Mario Praz has shown the prevalence of what he terms “the fatal woman” in western literature from Classical times onwards, and he devotes a particular section to Swinburne in his chapter “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” (239-279), but although he employs a wide variety of examples showing Swinburne’s utilisation of such a

figure, he does not describe her as his muse. More recently, Catherine Maxwell in her important book "The Female Sublime From Milton To Swinburne: Bearing Blindness" has dealt extensively with the presence of a female sublime often associated with Sappho, within the lyric of male poets. In relation to the nineteenth century she describes (after Alfred Austin) what she terms "the improper sublime", and she comments, "the Victorian form of the sublime most often gendered as feminine occurs as a force of uncontrollable and frequently violent energy"(3). She comments later: "male poets mime or identify with Sappho, the image of the supreme woman poet, or are blinded or feminised by her gaze..." (189). In her chapter on Swinburne "Between the woman's and the water's kiss: Swinburne's metamorphosis" she discusses the transfiguring and disfiguring power of this Sappho-associated sublime on Swinburne, and she comments: "Swinburne's honouring of female power is undisguised. As *femme fatale* goddess or muse, embodied in abstractions such as liberty or Fate, or as nature or natural powers such as the sea, the female principle is predominant in his work" (181). Here she seems to view the muse as only *one* of a number of dominant female manifestations which contribute to "the feminine principle" in Swinburne's work.<sup>3</sup> I take another view, and see these manifestations of the feminine principle as different forms taken by a single dominatrical muse. I equate this sublime with the Sapphic muse.

When Swinburne praises "her divine words" (Notes 20) and speaks of "the broken altar of her sacrifice of song" (Lang 4: 124), he attests to the spiritual power of Sappho's lyric; indeed, in "On The Cliffs" he affirms this, and as Meredith Raymond points out, he intimates that Sappho's "song is capable of imparting *sublimity* to the soul that hears" ("Swinburne among the Nightingales" 137). But it is also a song that pierces and associates itself with the masochistic power of the sublime.

Sappho fulfills Deshazer's three criteria, but in her own particular way – as indeed she must, since she is more than an abstract concept, she is an *actual* Greek muse, certified by no less an

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<sup>3</sup> The same applies to another assertion that she makes: "Swinburne obtains satisfaction by a headlong submission to poetic law, which we might call the law of the mother – of Sappho and the muses..." (191). Sappho is not presented specifically as Swinburne's muse.

authority than Plato: “Some say there are nine Muses: how careless! Look – Sappho of Lesbos is the tenth” (Campbell 49).<sup>4</sup> As Greek muse she is literally divine spirit. But her divine spirituality will be of a particular nature; she belongs to a Greek sisterhood, and she must be regarded as sharing their characteristics; and we can see how closely they chime with the characteristics of Swinburne’s dominatrix. In Chapter 1 I mentioned the incident of the muses’ blinding of Thamyris. Asklepiades, speaking of a possible lost play of Aeschylus fleshes out the story:

He thought himself superior to all others in song, and when the muses came to Thrace Thamyris proposed marriage to the whole lot of them, saying that among Thracians it was in order for a man to have many wives. They challenged him to a song contest on the terms that *if they won they could do as they pleased with him....* This was agreed to and the muses being victorious, took out his eyes” (Sommerstein 168).<sup>5</sup>

Thamyris is punished by the muses (of which Sappho has been elected member) for his failure in lyrical composition, just as Swinburne was later to be punished for his own supposed failure in this field at the hands of the cruel Sapphic Metre Mistress at Eton. These daughters of Zeus are capricious, aberrant women with their own agency, superior beings who will dally with the poet in the business of lyric and give pain as they wish. The relationship between the singer and the muse is seen in terms of a superior dominatrix and a creative male. Alison Sharrock writes of the muse:

Her relationship with the poet is sometimes overtly, more often covertly, shot through with erotic undertones. She includes ‘hints of the goddess courting a mortal man’ and also elements of the passive desired object... Even when not eroticized, the relationship between poet and Muse was a gendered one. (209)

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<sup>4</sup> She is on good terms with them, see Fragments 127, 128, 150.

<sup>5</sup> See also: “The equerry now came up leading their favourite bard, whom the muse loved above all others, though she had mingled good and evil in her gifts, robbing him of his eyes but lending sweetness to his song” (Odyssey 8: 63-67).

The Sappho who engineered possession of Swinburne is far from a passive object (since, as passive object, she would not have been desirable to Swinburne), however, the erotic overtones and the relationship between poet and goddess aptly describe the relationship between the poet and Sappho since, as we have seen, Swinburne regards her as divine and has adopted her as substitute mistress. Moreover, the aberrance so attractive to Swinburne, can be seen to draw from the figure of the Greek muse who brings with her the mystical trappings of the Ancient World. In his chapter “Muses and Mysteries” Alex Hardie paraphrases Strabo and comments: “there is a common Greek association of ‘everything orgiastic, Bacchic, choric and... mystic’, with Dionysus, Apollo, Hecate, *the Muses*, and Demeter; he notes choric activity as a feature common to all these cults, brings out the presiding role of the Muses over the *choroi*...” (15). This is an active muse intimately connected with sexual aberrance.

### **The muse as source, agent and product**

When we regard Sappho’s musehood as deriving from her Greekness, we can see a dominatrical figure who we can also relate to Maxwell’s trope of the Improper Sublime: “arresting the male gazer with the blinding light of her eyes.” But how does she actually work, how does she operate *within* Swinburne? Murray offers a useful description of the muse and her purpose:

The muse is process and product. What makes a muse different from other metapoetic figures is that she’s not confined to being an art form (although she can be that), she is also the means by which the art form is produced. Or rather, the source from which it derives. The Muse interjects something between the active male creator and the creation which he produces. (“The Muse: Creativity Personified?”150)

When Murray speaks of the muse, she makes a female agent the subject of her comments, as if saying that the muse has an ontological entity and an agency of her own: “*she* is the source...*she* interjects”; we see her acting on her own initiative just as the muses did in the case of Thamyris.



But how is it possible for her to have her own agency? And in particular, how is this possible for Swinburne's Sapphic muse? *What*, in fact, is she? What *is* her source? I now propose to use Murray's description in conjunction with reference to Freudian psychology in order to understand what exactly the Sapphic muse is, and how she works. I examine carefully the different components of this description and I start with "source".

In Chapter 2 we saw how Swinburne used "On The Cliffs" to describe a consciousness of his early commonality with Sappho: "My heart has been as thy heart, and my life / As thy life is, a sleepless hidden thing / Full of the thirst and hunger of winter and spring", he adds, "For all my days as all thy days from birth / My heart as thy heart was in me as thee / Fire; and not all the fountains of the sea / Have waves enough to quench it..." As well as expressing their commonality, the poet, perhaps unconsciously, indicates the *cause* of their commonality: "thirst and hunger" and "fire." What he is, in fact, talking about is a mass of instinctive sexual urges that he later came to associate with and identify as belonging to Sappho, (as I discussed in that chapter). We may, then, consider these sexual urges as constituting Swinburne's id analogised into Sappho.

What do I mean in making this claim? I start by quoting Russell Goldfarb's paraphrase of Freud: "The id is a fountainhead of sexuality called libidinal energy. Libido is a psychic energy in the form of sexual hunger..." (Sexual Repression and Victorian Literature 192). In the poem Swinburne claims:

...I knew not whence I knew  
This was the song that struck my whole soul through  
Pierced my keen spirit of sense with edge more keen,  
Even when I knew not, - even ere sooth was seen....

We can read here early intimations of libidinous stirring within in the id: a "keen spirit of sense", but as a child he does not recognise these urges for what they are, ( he cannot identify the id and what stirs within); however, when he later reflects on this, he is conscious of this

Sapphic presence as something that has always been there, as a “ fountainhead of sexuality”:  
“For all my days as all thy days from birth / My heart as thy heart was in me.” His constant avocation of Sappho as “sister” within the poem shows him trying to make some sort of sense of something he feels to be innate, through grasping at a tie of consanguinity: “as brother and sister were we, child and bird.” But, as we have seen from Swinburne’s relationship with Gordon, the concept of sister was itself imbued with sexual reference.

As we saw, he later came to actually identify Sappho with sexuality in different forms, but at this early age he recognised in the nightingale’s song something glittering and desirable and other (factor b), or what Goldfarb (after Freud) describes as “psychic energy in the form of sexual hunger”; but, as we have seen, he also recognised this signifier of Sappho as something that was in some inexplicable way, already present within himself. This is what I mean by claiming an association between Swinburne’s libido, and Sappho herself, and asserting that Sappho is analogised as Swinburne’s id.

We may regard the whole business of Sapphic possession as a Freudian process: whereas the id shapes the reality of one’s inner world, which Swinburne describes as “ my keen spirit of sense”, the ego records contacts with external reality, i.e. the times Swinburne “encountered” Sappho in different forms, as, say, in his meetings with Gordon. Part of the ego is conscious and part is unconscious and both, in Swinburne’s case, relate to Sappho. This mishmash of conscious and unconscious sexual urges can be seen described in the close of On The Cliffs when he speaks of “sleepless clear spring nights filled full of thee”; in other words, he both hears and sees the nightingale as he experiences nocturnal emissions: “Hath not the clear wind borne or seemed to bear / A song wherein all earth and heaven and sea / Were molten in one music made of thee?” It is here in the id, in the equivalence of sexuality in different forms and Sappho as signifier of its many forms, that the source of the muse will be found. But even allowing that, how does the muse emerge out of the id, how does she come to be “the means by which the art form is produced”? How does she employ her agency?

In order to explicate a complex process I shall refer to Goldfarb in relation to Swinburne's semi-autobiographical poem "Thalassius".<sup>6</sup> In the poem he presents an idealised vision of himself, but we can often read a rather different version from the intended one." In "On The Cliffs" we saw how Sappho expressed Swinburne's id through the latent libidinous energy of his instinctive childhood urges, I now argue that in "Thalassius" the muse is to be found expressing her agency in the discharge of this sexualized adult energy. Goldfarb usefully describes such a process:

Libidinous energy exists in the id in a condition of free mobility; the id constantly tries to discharge quantities of this energy. To be successfully discharged, that is, satisfied, libido must be invested in a sexual object.... But if society provides no sexual object found to be acceptable to the individual's conscience, if the ego and the superego disapprove of a sexual object, then the libidinous energy must be released in substitute objects, or dissipated in dreams and sublimations or even spent in literature. (192-3)

This build up of blind libidinous energy is a returning motif of the poem "Thalassius": to take one example, the poet describes the violent effect on him of this energy, in terms of experiencing a thunderstorm:

For when the red blast of their [the winds'] breath had made  
All heaven aflush with light more dire than shade,  
He felt it in his blood and eyes and hair

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<sup>6</sup> Swinburne writes to Watts-Dunton:

I once thought of a symbolic and quasi-autobiographical poem after the fashion of Shelley or Hugo, concerning the generation, birth and rearing of a by-blow of Amphitrite's – not even in dreams and symbols would I dare claim fellow-sonship to Thetis with Pelides, reared like Ion in the temple-service of Apollo. It would be a pretty subject, but where should I hear the last of my implied arrogance and self-conceit?" (Lang 4: 106).

However, he did write it! For further autobiographical references see Chapter 2 footnote 2.

Burn as if all the fires of the earth and air  
Had laid strong hold upon his flesh, and stung  
The soul behind it as with serpent's tongue,  
Forked like the loveliest lightning: nor could bear  
But hardly, half distraught with strong delight,  
The joy that like a garment wrapped him round...(227- 233)

The phrases “red blast” and “aflush with light”, suggest the power of the libidinous energy that Swinburne feels “in his blood and eyes and hair” as a burning sensation, but which make him “half distraught with strong delight,” (the two sensations being inextricably mixed in Swinburne’s psyche). Such a sensation which “laid strong hold upon his flesh, and stung”, is akin to that he experienced when “thy first Lesbian word flamed on me”, and describes the same sexual excitement.

Later in the poem he returns to the analogy of the storm and he describes how the libidinous energy becomes more violently disturbed by the appearance of the “bassarides”; these are maenads who represent the poet’s discovery of sex in the form of eroticised women, as they materialise out of “a noise of tempest”, and from “somewhere far forth of the un beholden”, an area as indefinable as the unconscious; they obsess him: “A shapeless earthly storm of shapes began / From all ways round to move in to the man”; he compares these wet dream figures to women partaking of the violence and horror of the gladiatorial games: “breast by passionate breast / Heaved hot with ravenous rapture, as they quaffed / The red ripe full fume of the deep live draught.” He returns to their maenadic activities and by inference their effect on him of the violence of the disturbed libido: “Red hands rent up the roots of old world trees / Thick flames of torches tossed as tumbling seas / Made mad the moonless and infuriate air.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> “...firs bowed down as briars or palms” refers to the maenads’ tying of bodies between two trees prior to letting the branches go in order to rend the bodies apart, an incident referred to in Euripides’ *Bacchae* (Vellacott 215) .

Such descriptions detail the increasing build-up of libidinous energy. The connection between the muse and the maenad was well-established. As Hardie explains, “The ritual choric activity of Dionysiac cults ... embraces the muse who presided over the dance, and she in turn is assimilated to the character of a choric maenad” (20). Similarly, commenting on the representation of Sappho and Alkaios on a red figure kalathoid vase, Dimetrios Yatromanolakis suggests that we “draw analogies between the two sides of the vase and ... read Sappho as being closely associated with a maenadic figure and Alkaios with Dionysus himself” (77).

In “Thalassius”, deadly female figures emerging from the dark places of the ancient world (the mountains of Thrace, the gladiatorial games of Rome) associate themselves with Sappho through her hellenising background, and on down through Baudelaire’s description of Lesbos as “*mère de jeux latines et des voluptés grecques.*” In the activities of these maenadic figures we also see the cruelty of Sappho’s sister muses who punished Thamyris, and we see the figures of Swinburne’s dominatrices, and the Sapphic constructs of fracture and aberrance manifested in their activities. These maenadic figures describe a mass of pulsating libidinous energy that connects itself with Sappho, and which longs to be discharged.

In the “Ion” Plato comments:

...just as the Corybantes are not in their right minds when they dance, lyric poets, too are not in their right minds when they make those beautiful lyrics, but as soon as they sail into harmony and rhythm they are possessed by Bacchic frenzy. (534a)

For Swinburne the “Bacchic frenzy” that he experiences in his encounters with his *bassarides* is the Sappho-associated libido necessary to make “those beautiful lyrics”, but to properly understand its working we need to look again at Freud. Goldfarb (after Freud) tells us, “libido must be invested in a sexual object”, but for Swinburne that was not possible: in the poem he describes his abortive experience of sex: “... Love’s face turned / And in his blind eyes burned / Hard light and heat of laughter..... He concludes: “O, fool, my name is sorrow; / Thou fool, my name is death.” Unlike his glamorised alter ego, Thalassius, Swinburne was not able to have a

sexual relationship and to sit “panther-throned beside Erigone, / Riding the red ways of the revel...” It wasn’t that “society provided no sexual object found to be acceptable” to Swinburne’s conscience, nor that “the ego and the superego disapproved of a sexual object”; it was because, as we saw in Chapter 2, he was incapable of utilising one. He was, as he admits in the poem, “a manchild with an ungrown god’s desire”, and he describes his desperate longing to find release for this libidinous energy:

For as the wild mares in Thessaly grow great  
With child of ravishing winds, that violate  
Their leaping length of limb with manes like fire...  
.....  
Even so the spirit in him when winds grew strong,  
Grew great with child of song. (455-9)

The use of the emotive words, “wild mares”, “ravishing winds”, “leaping length”, “manes like fire” suggest the violence of the libidinous energy while the analogy of the mares’ rape and pregnancy define its sexual origin.

However, since this longing cannot be satisfied naturally through sexual release, this libidinous energy will be instead “dissipated in dreams and sublimations or even spent in literature”, it will be diverted into “child of song.” This is a very different illegitimate birth from that discussed by Dowling in her chapter “Socratic Eros” (67-103) in which she shows how Pater and Symonds, drawing from Plato, view procreation taking place through various forms of male-male intercourse. Swinburne’s child, on the other hand, has been both conceived and delivered by the Sapphic muse.

This turning of libidinous energy from sexual fulfillment to artistic creation is, I argue, where the muse becomes an active force in the form of sublimated libido. To turn to Freud again: “the process of sublimation enables excessively strong excitations arising from particular sources of sexuality to find an outlet and use in other fields.... *Here we have one of the origins of artistic*

*activity*” (Goldfarb 162; emphasis added). As we saw in Chapter 2 Swinburne’s desire to release this libidinous energy can be observed in his response to scenes of flagellation as giving him “pleasure of an ecstatic nature”, a reaction he experienced equally in reading Sappho, and can also perhaps be seen to manifest itself physically in his habit of “drawing down and shaking his arms and hands when animated” (Gordon 12) or in “unaffected and unashamed ecstasies of adoration” at Mass (Henderson 8), indicative of the need to find “outlets in other fields.” That Swinburne actually saw this libidinous energy in relation to Sappho can be seen in his comment, “there is a value beyond price and beyond thought in the Lesbian music which *spends itself upon the record of fleshly fever and amorous malady* (“On Choice of Subjects”; Hyder SAC 147; emphasis added). The use of the verb “spends” doubles with the contemporary colloquial usage of the word for ejaculation.

We may, then, personify this thrusting libidinous energy as the muse, who failing to find a satisfactory sexual outlet, conflates with and diverts herself into lyric form. “She is,” as Murray puts it, “the means by which the art form is produced.” But does she also “interject something between the active male creator and the creation which he produces”?

It seems to me that it isn’t so much a matter of something *other* being interjected between the poet and the muse, but instead, a deliberate act by the muse of diverting her own (sexual) energy into lyric, an act which is necessary because this is a muse that the poet cannot satisfy naturally. It is in this sense that we may speak of the muse as possessing her own agency, and “the process” that Murray speaks of, is demonstrated in her exercising of control over the poet, or in other words, the battering out of verse as a reflection of the battering of the ego by the libido. This business of diverting the sexual energy is a violent business involving pain and suffering to both the poet (the ego) and to the muse (the emergent libido) because the act of diverting the energy from its natural end is like altering the flow of a river in flood and attempting to damn the flow. Goldfarb comments:

Unless gratified, sexual impulses continually press towards some kind of fulfilment. Their intensive force in the form of libidinal energy constantly batters the ego, which

must itself constantly spend energy keeping that force in check. The process is dynamic and continuous as long as the repressed libidinal energy cannot leave the unconscious by being granted entrance to the conscience and motility. Libidinous energy is released when pressure from the id overcomes the counter pressure from the ego. Even then there can be no anxiety-free expression of that energy if the super-ego wants it blocked. (196-7)

If we return again to “On The Cliffs” we can see this intense force and violence of the libido analogously enacted in the person of Cassandra, and we can appreciate that the muse is Sapphic in origin because of Sappho’s association with the prophetess through Aeschylus which Swinburne had discovered at Eton (discussed in Chapter 2). Here the violence of the libido personified by Cassandra is vividly described: she is “Love’s priestess, mad with pain and joy of song / Song’s priestess, mad with joy and pain of love.” We see the libidinous force in the form of the maddened woman struggling for release from the constraints put upon it: she is the “bodeful bondslave” of Apollo, who performs the role of the superego trying to contain her, but she is too strong for him: “ he might not win her will”, as she strives to fulfil herself sexually: “errant on dark ways diverse”, but Cassandra’s sexuality has been violated and unable to express herself sexually, she is instead driven to express herself in song /prophecy, just as the muse must express herself in verse. But the process has been painful, she is “spirit wounded.” However, “On The Cliffs” is a retrospective look at Sapphic possession, it does not explore the traumatic effect of the muse on the poet (that will be the business of Poems and Ballads:1), but there are intimations of the pain that will be involved for the poet: imagery depicting piercing and wounding has been used throughout the poem and it ends with the ominous mention of the “sundering of the two-edged spear of time”, and Sappho’s own exemption from it “but thine the spear may waste not that he wields”; however the spear with its phallic associations awaits its sundering in Poems and Ballads:1 when, as we shall see, the muse sets about the poet’s castration and death. “A Song in Time of Revolution” concludes with the lines: “The sides of the two-edged sword shall be bare, and its mouth shall be red.”



Through a consideration of Freud and with reference to Murray we can see a distinctive and violent muse whose source derives from the murky depths of the id in the form of libido that violently turns sexual energy into verse, and who comprises both the source and the means of verse composition; as she seeks to utilise the poet for her own ends and to disregard his superego, she emerges as a terrifying figure akin to the female sublime that Maxwell sees inherent in lyric itself: “the Ciconian woman, the veiled woman, the Medusa, a vengeful Philomela, the muse” (110).

This emergence of the Sapphic libido is described by Swinburne, unwittingly perhaps, in his comments on the composition of “Dolores”. In a letter to Charles Augustus Howell he writes, “I have added yet four more jets of boiling and gushing infamy to the perennial and poisonous fountain of Dolores. Write – and communicate to the ink une odeur mélangée de sang et de sperme” (Lang 1: 122-123).<sup>8</sup>

Several things emerge from this passage: firstly, that the writing of “Dolores” was patently an emergence of the libido, culminating in a virtual ejaculation, “jets of boiling and gushing infamy...” This is more explicitly defined by the use of the word “sperme” a few lines later. In other words, “Dolores” has “turned” the libido and made it into an embodiment of herself, and she announces her presence unequivocally: Swinburne does not put Dolores in parentheses, she is as much woman as she is poem. And what a woman! As antithesis of the virgin, as Lady of Pain, we can see she is intimately connected with Sappho, the Metre Mistress of the Eton days, because his PPS to the letter requests Howell to write him a flagellation scene. “Write me this – and you shall have more of my verses – a fair bargain.”

The trope of flagellation with its Sapphic connections (see Chapter 2) is associated with the act of writing the poem, i.e. Swinburne’s chosen fetish is utilised by the muse. Her limbs are “as melodies”, as Sappho’s are metrical limbs; like the emergent libido they “move to the music of passion.” Her true nature as the dominatrix par excellence emerges in the poem. She is one of the many “holy women”, the anti-Virgins of Poems and Ballads:1 (see last chapter), whereas the

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<sup>8</sup> “a smell comprising blood and sperm.”

Virgin is wholly good, Dolores' sins are so many that they cannot be reckoned, and whereas the Virgin's rightful place is in the pure air of Heaven, Dolores' sins would even pollute that air. This, then, is a terrifying muse, springing fully armed like Athene, not from the forehead of Zeus, but from the libido of Swinburne, determined to do battle with his ego and embody herself in verse. This Sapphic muse emanates from what Carlyle in his essay on the unconscious Characteristics, terms "the regions of Death and Night" (Works 28:5). Sussman probes Carlyle's thinking on the unconscious:

Carlyle constantly displaces interior sickness or disorder and its overflow or flood from the male self, more particularly the Anglo- Saxon male self, onto the Other, most notably on to the female ....As projections of the male self, these disruptive women become a violent other, woman as an anti-muse that figures the unhealthful, potentially uncontrollable energy that defines the male body and the male psyche.  
(21)

It is this anti-muse, this that the Sapphic muse represents; whereas Carlyle saw art/poetry emerging as a result of the repression of the libido, the Sapphic muse emerged as the *expression* of the libido in all its unspeakable aberrance as these lines from "Dolores" illustrate:

By the ravenous teeth that have smitten  
Through the kisses that blossom and bud,  
By the lips intertwined and bitten  
Till the foam has a savour of blood,  
By the pulse as it rises and falters,  
By the hands as they slacken and strain  
I adjure thee, respond from thy altars,  
Our lady of Pain.

Here the poet expresses the painful and violent thrusting of the pent up sexual energy, the "odeur mélangée de sang et de sperme", that cannot be satisfied by sexual congress and he begs

the muse to “respond from thy altars”, to continue enabling this tumescence and rather than attempting to restrain the force, the poet allows it to master his psyche and he celebrates this mastery. It was this celebration that John Morley was forced to acknowledge when he described Swinburne as a “libidinous poet of a band of satyrs” (Hyder CH 29).

We know that the muse seeks release of the libidinal energy from which she is sprung and seeks to divert the energy into verse, but what exactly does she want from verse? Or, to put it more prosaically what sort of verse will emerge when the poet submits to the violent prompting of the psyche?

There is one more part of Murray’s description, not yet directly discussed which needs consideration in order to throw light on this question: “The muse is process and *product*. What makes a muse different from other metapoetic figures is that she’s not confined to being *an art form* (although she can be that) but is also the means by which the *art form* is produced” (emphasis added).

As we have seen, the muse is agent and source, but she is also the completed artefact, the actual art form, the poem itself, and indeed in Chapter 1 we saw a number of instances of the Sapphic muse as exactly that as, for example, in the Pradier statuettes. My aim in this section is to look in detail at the muse’s position as artefact in Poems and Ballads: 1 and I consider the nature and effects of her embodiment within it.

It is to become a finished artefact that is the *raison d’ être* of the muse, for if the libidinous energy cannot be satisfied naturally, then the substitute that is found for it must be equally, perhaps more, satisfying because the completed artefact must represent the consummation of the libido in terms of the muse’s embodiment. Her favourite embodiment will be a poem representing as many facets of herself as possible, and because a muse must necessarily associate herself with an actual woman, whether as one of the Muses, or as the poet’s beloved, she will be most satisfied when the poem bears the name of her own chosen representative, and because of her own nature, connected as it is with the cruelly high-handed classical muse, and

her own constructs of Aberrance, Fracture and the Dionysian, the chosen woman will be herself aberrant, as we have just seen in the case of Dolores.

We can see a useful example of the process in the dramatic fragment “Pasiphae”. The Cretan queen is a most suitable choice for the muse’s own embodiment since she too emanates from the darkness of myth (or, in Swinburne’s case, the poet’s id), and she is by nature an aberrant woman who will later assert her aberrance alongside Sappho herself in “The Masque of Queen Bersabe”. Pasiphae has sought out Daedalus, (rather as Sharrock describes the muse as “the goddess courting a mortal man”; she wants him to design an artefact, a hollow wooden cow in which she can lie to satisfy her lust for the minotaur: “... her desire be saturated & feed / Till it wax faint & glut the belly and the womb / At all obscure & delicate orifices...” Like the poet, she cannot satisfy her sexual urges naturally and she will seek an alternative form of expression. She has chosen a skillful craftsman, in this case Daedalus, who designs “a cunning carven beast,” just as the muse has roused her chosen poet to elegantly express her libido, and who will, like Daedalus, make “this goodly shape / Stand excellent.” As Pasiphae “does creep close in” to inhabit the cow’s body and make it her own, so does the muse take her place inside the poem, “fitting to the measure of the make”. The craftsman/poet has enabled the muse to inhabit a body whereby she can express her lust, and the poet has given her a body which is recognised and celebrated as a completed artifact, a poem entitled with her name, “Pasiphae.”

Swinburne, unwittingly perhaps, fully explicates the whole process in relation to “Faustine”:

...The chance which suggested to me this poem was one which may happen any day to any man – the sudden sight of a living face which recalled the well-known likeness of another dead for centuries; in this instance, the noble and faultless type of the elder Faustina, as seen in coin and bust. Out of that casual glimpse and sudden recollection these verses sprang and grew. (Hyder SR 26)

What is being said here? Swinburne sees a woman's face that stirs his libido because she represents the type of woman he finds most sexually exciting, the dominatrix, Faustine.<sup>9</sup> He sees her not as herself, but as a metamorphosing type of aberrant woman who, because his libido is blocked, must become diverted into verse. That the muse is the initial source of inspiration arising from the libido, and also Sapphic in origin, can be seen in the lines of the resultant eponymous poem: "Stray breaths of Sapphic song that blew / Through Mitylene / Shook the fierce quivering blood in you / By night, Faustine." That the libido is at work can be seen when these "stray breaths", dimly experienced urgings of the libido take action: "*Shook* the fierce quivering blood in you / By night, Faustine." Here the muse is violently turning herself into a full blown poem in which she can be visibly embedded, and even her appearance can be accurately described since Swinburne has actually witnessed it in "the noble and faultless type of the elder Faustina, as seen in coin and bust." And it can now be reproduced: "Strong, heavy brows, throwing out the face," and "hard bright chin / And shameful scornful lips."<sup>10</sup> The poet asks her to assert the presence that he so much desires, but which can only be reproduced in verse: "Lean back, and get some minutes' peace; / Let your head lean / Back to the shoulder with its fleece / Of locks, Faustine." Her presence expands and fills the poem until she is the artifact itself, a particular phenomenon, a poem entitled "Faustine".

I now turn to "A Ballad of Life" because it not only further explicates the process, but also introduces its pendant, "A Ballad of Death" which will show the muse's subsequent intention. This poem constitutes a rather more complex description of the process, but as it is the first poem in the volume, it may usefully be regarded as a blueprint for the volume as a whole, and I look at it in some detail. At the beginning of the poem we see the Sapphic muse emerging from Swinburne's unconscious: "I saw in dreams...." and she then proceeds to position herself within a garden, her own natural habitat, as one of the muses who frequent pastoral places, and also drawing from her own poetic fondness for flowers and gardens, (Fragments, 2, 81,94, 105c, 122,

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<sup>9</sup> Faustina was the elder Anna Galleria Faustina, wife of the Emperor Antoninus Pius. Later tradition attributed aberrance to her (although apparently without justification).

<sup>10</sup> As we saw in Chapter 2 Swinburne has also seen her prototype in paintings by Burne-Jones and Rossetti.

132, for example), topoi which resonate with Swinburne's own fond memories of childhood, spent in the company of his erstwhile muse, Mary Gordon, who tells of "lovely gardens and words to roam or play in"(11).<sup>11</sup> The muse adopts the traditional form of a beautiful woman who will inspire the poet, "A lady clothed like summer with sweet hours." The sight of the woman stirs his libido: "Her beauty, fervent as a fiery moon, / Made my blood burn and swoon...." Swinburne's libido has fashioned a dominatrix very much to his liking, (she is in fact Lucrezia Borgia), whom his superego associates with her attendants, "Lust and "Fear" and "Shame". Then the muse begins to offer lyric as an alternative outlet: "She held a little cithern by the strings / Thereat her hands began a-lute playing ....and all the while she sung." The poet instantly feels the violent effect of the turning of his libido into verse: "Thy mouth makes beat my blood in feverish rhymes," he feels "extreme sad delight" and a poem begins to emerge that will be inspired by the muse's aberrance as her song is sung in "a strange" tongue.<sup>12</sup> In the final stanza the poet addresses the almost complete poem and instructs it to go to the Borgia-muse who is now embodied within it, and whose inspiration has been prevalent in its composition:

Forth, ballad, and take roses in both arms,  
 Even till the top rose touch thee in the throat  
 Where the least thornprick harms;  
 And girdled in thy golden singing-coat,  
 Come thou before my lady...

This complex and confusing command can be understood if we realise that up to this point the ballad only exists as an idea in the poet's mind: "found in *dreams*", i.e. as source of inspiration. But now it needs form, a desire shared equally by the muse, and in order to express the idea of

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<sup>11</sup> "... they were born in Pieria to Memory...oblivious to ills and respite from cares ...their carefree hearts set on song – not far from the topmost peak of snowy Olympus...lovely is the sound they produce from their mouths as they sing and celebrate the ordinances and the good ways of the immortals" (Hesiod 53-67). See also Fragment 134 for reference to dream talking: "I talked with you in a dream, Cyprogeneia."

<sup>12</sup> The use of the word "strange" would be much used by Pater to reference sexual aberrance. For Swinburne's acknowledged influence on Pater, see Letter to Lord Morley, April 1883. (Gosse and Wise. The Letters of Algernon Charles Swinburne. 107-8).

this Borgia muse (who cannot be sexually satisfied) and her strange singing, and for the verse to achieve closure, there must be (virtual) physical contact between them – virtual orgasm.

Swinburne is only too ready to set about the sexual preliminaries: he will take her “roses in both arms”, but he hides his physical excitement within the poem’s “golden singing coat.” He anticipates a warm reception: “... she will stoop herself none otherwise / Than a blown vine-branch doth, / And kiss thee with soft laughter on thine eyes, / Ballad, and on thy mouth.”<sup>13</sup>

The libido has been conflated with lyric and diverted into verse, and the verse is underscored with the muse’s own dominatrical presence, since it is a poem about Lucrezia Borgia. She has fulfilled Murray’s criteria for the muse: through her lute-playing she has activated the turning of libido into song, i.e. she has “processed” the poem, she is the source from which it derives since she emanates from the libido in the form of a beautiful woman; she has interjected herself between the poet and his unconscious and turned herself into a ballad form which the poet has “embraced”. Indeed, by the end of the poem it would appear that satisfying mutual experience *has* taken place. The poet aided by the conflation of the muse’s aberrant sexuality and her lyric virtuosity, has composed his poem, and the Muse satisfied by her possession of the poet, has achieved embodiment within it and become the product.

### **Thanatos and the muse**

“A Ballad of Death” would appear to endorse and celebrate the success of this first encounter: we are told of the mutual satisfaction of poet and muse: “O smitten lips where through this voice of mine / Came softer with her praise”; the muse has inspired the poet with her “smitten lips” and he has embodied her in the poem, “through this voice of mine.” Sexual favours have apparently been given and received: “The kisses of her mouth were more than wine.” The successful embodiment has apparently met the requirements of muse and poet, but there is a significant fact to be noted: we are no longer dealing with “A Ballad of *Life*”, but “A Ballad of

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<sup>13</sup> The idea of the muse’s condescension towards the poet signified by the use of the word “stooping” is echoed in “Ave atque Vale”: “But bending us-ward with memorial urns / The most high muses.....” This idea also resonates with Sharrock’s description of the muse “courting a mortal man.”

*Death*”: the admired body has revealed itself, not as “a lady clothed like Summer”, but as a corpse: “my lady’s likeness [is] crowned and robed and dead.”

We have been warned: Poems and Ballads:1 will be a volume much concerned with death – a fitting subject for verses inspired by a long-dead muse and a poet who has surrendered his sentient being to her. Indeed, in the last chapter we saw how Sappho’s own tropes of thanatos are constantly being echoed, and it would be fair to say that almost every poem in the volume contains some reference to death, but Poems and Ballads:1 will be more than a collection of tropes of thanatos, instead it will vividly re-enact the process of Swinburne’s own submission to Sappho, and it will further explicate the working of the libido and the death drive in the form of the Sapphic muse. I see her operating on the poet in four distinct yet overlapping modes that will draw him towards his own form of death: enforced necrophilia; an interplay between putrescence and inspiration; a conflation of eros and thanatos, and finally, fatal castration which will bring him to a state of Nirvana in which the sacrifice of his own masculinity and personality leave him no sentience, except as a channel of Sapphism.

The muse’s embodiment has, in fact, robbed her of life; she no longer inhabits the form of a living woman, but instead, presents herself dead on a bier. Faustine too, is not, in fact, a living woman, but a “fed sarcophagus” with “lips half-kissed away”. This is the body that the Muse now presents to the poet and his audience. Nor does she just present it; she demands its adoration – she requires an act of necrophilia. What effect will this have on the poet and his verse?

This slipping between life and death is something the Sapphic muse is practised at, since she has spent two thousand years as a corpse herself or inhabiting others’ corpses or corpora.<sup>14</sup> Like

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<sup>14</sup> Reynolds comments on a similar exercise of necrophilia:

One reason why memories of Sappho’s pictures persist is because there are so many, her legends have generated a huge number of images over the last 250 years, and one of the stranger things about Sappho is that artists return to her again and again.....once it seems is never enough with Sappho, her imaginary body is a property to be enjoyed by these artists. (TSH 54)



Pater's *La Gioconda*, "she has been dead many times" (25), and it is easy for her to glide between life and death, as she will demonstrate vividly later in "Masque of Queen Bersabe", where (along with fourteen other long-dead aberrant women) she allows herself to be conjured up from the dead. Now, having introduced the poet to the idea of death – not his yet, but hers, she entices him to come and make love to her corpse as she presents herself to him, and indeed, the poet enthusiastically anticipates this act of necrophilia:

Ah! that my tears filled all her woven hair  
And all the hollow bosom of her gown –  
Ah! that my tears ran down  
Even to the place where many kisses were,  
Even where her parted breast-flowers have place,  
Even where they are cloven apart – who knows not this?

At the end of the poem he admits his delight in the act: he "that was thrall to Love / Is become thrall to death." In his article "The Sterile Star of Venus: Swinburne's Dream of Flight", Peter Anderson discusses "The Ballad of Death" and argues that Swinburne focuses "less on the possibility of the particular sexual act than on the imputed universality of the fantasy" (20). I would argue instead that Swinburne is unconcerned with other people's fantasies, but very much concerned with the alternative sexual act that Anderson so vividly describes, the necrophilic worship of the dead muse that will inspire him and result in his verse. Indeed, Anderson actually describes the peculiarly personal way in which Swinburne envisages the act: "his impassioned need to let his tears trickle down to penetrate and fill up the corpse, making it sexually wet."

This necrophilic worship is a logical step for Swinburne since it is adoration of Sappho's relics that have caused him to regard her as "the greatest poet who ever was at all .... judging even from the *mutilated fragments* fallen within our reach from the *broken altar* of her sacrifice of song" (Lang 4:124; emphasis added). Prins points to a particularly graphic example of Swinburne's interest in the Sapphic corpse. She reproduces a manuscript page of "Anactoria" and comments: "we see how Swinburne decomposes his Sapphic imitation in the very act of

composing it. The draft is an extraordinary visual spectacle; it puts the text on display like a *corps morcelé* with its disjointed limbs scattered across the page, severed and splayed in every direction” (117).

Indeed, interest in the female corpse is not such a novel idea. Nina Auerbach comments: “Victorian culture abounds in beautiful corpse-like women” (41). She draws attention to public interest in different forms of the female “dead body”, citing Madame Tussaud’s 1851 waxwork collection and Burne-Jones “Briar Rose” sequence painted in the seventies. Elizabeth Bronfen points out that there had already been considerable interest in idea of the physical embodiment of the Muse in the form of the dead woman:

...[what is] remarkable about the inversion of the poet-muse relation that once again becomes prominent at the turn of the eighteenth century is the fact that status of muse is transferred again on to a corporeally existent beloved, only now she is dying or already dead....Inspirational power is first drawn from a dead beloved and then rendered in poetic narrative commenting on this exchange. Far from wishing to preserve a beloved on earth beyond her death, these mourning poets need absence to create, at the same time that they need the fructifying power of the dead as mediators with the otherness that lies beyond the knowledge of any survivor. (365)

However, this is not quite the case with Swinburne and the corpse of the Sapphic muse, since it is not the absence from the muse and her mediation with the other that he craves, but it is the actual presence of dead matter that he desires.

When Swinburne comments, “Marlowe and Shakespeare, Aeschylus and Sappho, do not for us live only on the dusty shelves of libraries” (“Dedicatory Epistle”, Hyder SR 101), he draws from contemporary concern with the involuntary ingestion of dead matter and makes a conflation between library dust and human ashes.<sup>15</sup> However it is not simply the pulverised body he

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Douglas-Fairhurst comments on Victorian interest in the involuntary breathing in of dead matter and he refers to Tyndall’s comments on the omniscience of inorganic matter that caked the walls of the British Museum.

desires, but the *pulverising* body. In discussing Baudelaire's "Une Charogne", he comments, "Thus even of the loathsome bodily putrescence and decay he can make some noble use; pluck out its meaning and secret, even its beauty, in a certain way, from actual carrion; as here of the flies bred in a carcass" (Hyder SAC 30).<sup>16</sup> It is the putrescence of the carcass that he sees as the source of Baudelaire's inspiration, and it is Sappho's *fractured* body that fructifies Swinburne.<sup>17</sup> Not only has he worshipped Sappho's "mutilated fragments", but he has also been attracted by her decomposed body, the adaptations and reworkings of her, that have bred from her carcass like maggots, and even her smell that he had discovered clinging to her in his favourite authors, and which he has so avidly sought after since his days at Eton.

"The Leper" provides a particularly good example of the poet's fascination with the putrescence of the body of his dead beloved. The speaker, significantly described as "a poor scribe", like the peasant and the poet has been distanced from his beloved by her superior status: he has "served" her in "a royal house"; when she is cast out by her family and lover because she has contracted leprosy, he takes it upon himself to look after her as she dies and to watch over her after her death; his words describing how she "shed life out by *fragments*", describe both Sappho whose life has also been one of fragmentation and fracture, and the desire the poet feels for physical contact with the putrescent: "her hair half grey, half ruined gold, / Thrills me and burns me in

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He offers two instances from Dickens: 1) The Uncommercial Traveller where there is "a strong kind of invisible snuff drifting up from pulverised corpses", and 2) in Oliver Twist where Mr Sowerberry's snuff box takes the form of "an ingenious little model of a patent coffin" (87).

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Beddoes had made a similar point earlier in speaking of the Germans attitude towards their poets: "alive they are golden heavenly fellows....they die a weeping willow and an elegy sticks over their graves – and as the tree draws nourishment out of their decaying corporeal substance, a younger rival sets the roots of his fame in their literary remains, and flourish as fast as these latter rot" (606-7).

<sup>17</sup> Swinburne was conscious that he was treading on dangerous ground and he hastened to attribute an interest in putrescence to others:

... the whiter the sepulchre without, the ranker the rottenness within. Each touch of plaster is a sign of advancing decay. The virtue of our critical journals is a dowager of somewhat dubious antecedents; each day that thins and shrivels her cheek thickens and hardens the paint on it...the taint on her fly-blown reputation is hard to overcome by patches and perfumery. (Hyder SR 30)

However, the expression "fly- blown" seems to me to recall the inspiration for "Une Charogne", and to intimate his own obsession with putrescence and decay.

kissing it.” In her discussion of the poem Glennis Byron claims: “what this lover desired and got was simply the ability to exert his will” (Dramatic Monologue 73), but this is not an exercise of power by the lover/poet, it is instead a submission by him to the putrescent power of the corpse in order to draw his inspiration from it. From the adoration of the corpse comes the masochistic sublime: “Love bites and stings me through,” replicating the effect of Sappho’s own verses that “strike and sting. In Lesbia Brandon Swinburne describes the very effect of this Sapphic corpse as the boy Herbert sits by the dying Lesbia: “Along her sofa, propped up by cushions and with limbs drawn up like a dead child’s, lay or leant a woman like a ghost; the living corpse of Lesbia.” The boy draws inspiration from it: “the figure and the place were lurid in his eyes...there was an attraction in them which *shot heat into his veins* instead of the chill and heaviness of terror or grief.” (158; emphasis added).

In referring to Sappho’s role in “Anactoria”, Prins speaks of Swinburne’s “complex mediation between corpse and corpus; the body of the poet is sacrificed to the body of her song, and the body of song is sacrificed to posterity, which recollects the scattered fragments in order to recall Sappho herself as the long-lost origin of poetry” (115-116). In the poem we see the poet doing just that as he re-collects the scattered fragments and holds “in two cold palms her cold two feet.” However, I see this re-collecting of fragments as something more than a “complex mediation between corpse and corpus”. I see a delight enhanced by the putrescent. In the previous chapter I referred to Prins’ comments on the use of Sappho as an exemplar of metrical “parts” such as *kola*, (legs), *podes* ( feet) and *daktyli*, (fingers); thus when the poet sits holding “in two cold palms her two cold feet” he has taken “the lost white limbs of the Lesbian Sappho adrift”, and ecstatically intertwined them with his own; he has become a “resurrection man” who will worship Sappho’s decomposed body, and indeed tenderly “lift” her body parts when he intertextualises her verse with his own.

This desire for the putrescent through the Sapphic body is again demonstrated in “Les Noyades”, a poem which we saw in the last chapter has manifold Sapphic associations. We must read the poem analogously: the speaker of the dramatic monologue, “one rough with labour”, signifies the poet in the throes of his composition, who like Swinburne has “loved this woman

my whole life long.” The lady “noble by name and face” is his Sapphic muse from whom, like the peasant, he has been distanced by her high birth, or in Swinburne’s case, Sappho’s divinity, but now he is offered an enforced binding of their bodies, “bosom to bosom”, his body to hers as they are cast into the Loire. Like the peasant, the poet longs to cleave to the dead body of Sappho in order to attain his own sublime: “I shall drown with her, laughing for love; and she / Mix with me, touching me, lips and eyes.” In his embracement of the Sapphic corpse “to yield, go down, locked hands and feet, Die, drown together, and breath catch breath”, he receives the fructifying power he craves: “now I shall have you dead.”

This desire to cling to the muse’s dead body has some affinity with the discourse of Bloom when he speaks of the “blessing achieved by the latecomer poet as a wrestling Jacob, who cannot let the great depart finally, without receiving a new name, all his own”(Poetry and Repression 5). However, although the Swinburnean poet desires the benison of the divine muse through physical contact, like Jacob as he wrestled with God for his blessing, he is damaged by the divine power; however, the poet does not wrestle but he cleaves, “locked hands and feet”, and his inspiration does not come from a superior living power, but from a dead and putrescent one. This makes for uncomfortable reading, as we shall see in the following chapters. Indeed, the critic John Morley catches something of Swinburne’s necrophilic activities when he describes Poems and Ballads: 1 as “the spurious passion of a putrescent imagination” (Saturday Review 24).

In these poems we have seen Sappho in the form of the muse presenting her dead body for Swinburne to adore, allowing him only this means of coming physically near her, just as in the narrative of his life, he so often sought her elusive embraces through the dark and aberrant. He remarks: “...no one can feel more deeply the inadequacy of my work. “That is not Sappho,” a friend said once to me. I could only reply, ‘it is as near as I can come and no man can come close to her’” (Notes 21). It is not only through his work that Swinburne is conscious of inadequacy; this adoration of Sappho’s dead body is indeed the only way in which Swinburne can “come” physically, or ejaculate into verse. But this is not normal behaviour, and in the next chapter we shall see abnormality as forming part of a new sublime.

So far we have seen how the muse has displayed her agency in turning the libido and achieving her own embodiment, and how she has compelled the poet to perform acts of necrophilia upon this body. However, this offered necrophilia has been only an enticing introduction to her grand plan, the muse or libido - we now may conflate the two - has another intent: to propel the poet towards a form of death, because only in this way can she prove her own supremacy over him. How exactly will this ultimate process work? What form will the poet's death take?

In Eros and Civilisation Herbert Marcuse shows how the libido employs the trope of memory to recapture "the temps perdû, ...the time of gratification and fulfilment." He adds: "Eros penetrating into consciousness is moved by remembrance" (186). We have seen how Sappho's lyrics too, have been concerned with past jouissance, and how the verse with its juxtaposed tropes of remembering and forgetting, have, as Reynolds puts it, "the function ... always to re-light desire – through words". For Swinburne, however, there had never been a time of gratification since his impotence has meant it has never been experienced in the first place, and he can only associate this non-existent temps perdû with Sappho's own; and we have seen how Swinburne's libido has associated itself with Sappho in the form of the muse to mimic the process of trying to recreate her jouissance through the trope of memory, which, as we saw in Chapter 3, endless recurs throughout the Poems and Ballads:1. However, even if the poet had looked back to a time of actual gratification, his pleasure would have been short-lived. Marcuse explains the reason for the failure of such a process:

...the wish of Faust which conjures the pleasure principle demands, not the beautiful moment, but eternity... The death-instinct operates under the Nirvana principle: it tends towards that state of 'constant gratification' where no tension is felt – a state without want...Pleasure principle and Nirvana principle then converge. (186-7)

The libido, then, desires the eternalisation of "the beautiful moment" in which "all the sting and stain of long delight", described in "Stage Love", can belong not to a single act, but to eternity. It is constrained to seek out death, since the living lack the means of prolonging the beautiful

moment; it goes stale: “A month or twain to live on honeycomb / Is pleasant; but one tires of scented thyme” (“Before Parting”). Sadly echoing Sappho, he desires “neither the bee nor the honey” (Fragment 146).

Day hath not strength nor the night shade enough  
To make love whole and fill his lips with ease,  
As some bee-builed cell  
Feels at filled lips the heavy honey swell.

In “Interlude” we are told: “There was something the season wanted”; in “Before Dawn” we can see what this something is: the drive of eros to connect with thanatos: “To lull you till one stilled you / To kiss you till one killed you.” In the last chapter we saw how Sappho expressed the same desire in her frequently juxtaposed tropes of eros and thanatos, and how these are continually echoed throughout Poems and Ballads: 1. “In the Orchard” is a particular example of the longing to promote “the beautiful moment” into eternity: “Slay me ere day can slay desire again”, and the poet asserts that this result will be superior to anything life can offer: “Take life and all, for I will die, I say; / Love, I gave love, is life a better boon?”

The Sapphic muse desires not only to recall the act of jouissance in verse, but to take both the act and the verse encapsulating the act, into eternity. This desire is explained in “Anactoria”: “...they shall praise me and say / She hath all time as all we have our day.” She adds triumphantly: “I, Sappho shall be one with all these things, / With all high things forever.” However, this success has only been achieved by a supreme act of sadomasochism. In the poem Sappho will “crush thee out of life”, the orgasm and the poem will be achieved and prolonged into eternity only if “Thy body were abolished and consumed / And in my flesh thy very flesh entombed.” In A Defence of Masochism Anita Phillips comments:

...having intended to promote the health-giving pursuit of pleasure Freud seems forced to recognize deadly impulses as the most fundamental. Erotogenic

masochism enters into this much more ambitious picture...like sadism it is made up of a combination of death instinct and libido. (32)

It is Swinburne's own need to engage in masochism and its concomitant attraction towards thanatos, that the muse now utilizes to further her design: she will bring about his "death" using her own tropes to aid her.

In her chapter "Beneath the woman's and the water's kiss: Swinburne's metamorphoses", Maxwell demonstrates how eagerly Swinburne undergoes a masochistic process, and she cites the burning brand associated with Meleager's painful expiry in "Atalanta" and decapitation in "Chastelard" as early examples of Swinburne's interest in symbolic castration (TFS187). However, I regard the poet's effeminisation and castration as only part of a process, preliminary deaths, as it were, which precourse the poet's final demise in the form of the total loss of identity; this is a state which refracts Swinburne's own absorption into a virtual existence within the process of Sapphic possession. I now turn to the poem "Laus Veneris" to explicate this ongoing process.

Thaïs Morgan draws attention to Robert Peter's article (PPR3:1979 12-28) and she comments that Swinburne's "knight artist" exemplifies the creative process ("Swinburne's Dramatic Monologues"187); that Tannhäuser enacts the role of poet in the poem, can be understood from Swinburne's own comment: "I have made Venus the one love of her knight's whole life, as Mary Stuart of Chastelard's; I have sent him, *poet* and soldier, fresh to her fierce embrace" (Hyder SR 27; emphasis added). In the last chapter we saw how Venus and Sappho become conflated, one acting as a signifier for the other. Enclosed in the horsel, imprisoned by the demands of his libido, the poet has become the muse's creature: "Yea, she laid hold upon me, and her mouth / Clove unto mine, as soul to body doth." As she imposes her will on him, he takes on the passive role usually associated with the woman. Lying in the luxurious female space of the horsel where "her beds are made of perfume and sad sound", the poet / knight admits that he has lost the right to the badge of masculinity implicit in the idea of work: "Ah God that I were as all souls that be, /...As men that toil through hours of labouring night." He



looks back at the days when he could exercise his masculinity by belonging to the company of “beautiful mailed men”. He ponders, “I do know / These things were sweet, but sweet such years ago.” He no longer has any part of that masculine life symbolised by “the fair pure sword”, and he thinks of those events as “sweet finished things.”<sup>18</sup> The poet accepts his effeminisation by the muse as Tannhäuser his, by Venus:

Alas thy beauty! For thy mouth's sweet sake  
My soul is bitter to me, my limbs quake  
As water, as the flesh of men that weep,  
As their heart's vein whose heart goes nigh to break.

He has, in fact, become reduced to the hysterical female state described in Sappho's Fragment 31: “My tongue has snapped, at once a subtle fire has stolen beneath my flesh, I see nothing with my eyes, my ears hum, sweat pours from me, a trembling seizes me all over, I am little short of dying.” Venus has, in effect, castrated Tannhäuser, now she finally condemns him to a living death: “Abiding away out of all men's sight”; the poet must dwell forever in this topos of death, “this heavy-hearted place” under the power of feminine possession, where he vainly seeks to revivify his libido by the trope of memory: “Remembering love and all the dead delights.” Tannhäuser's erotogenic masochism has brought him to this state, just as Swinburne's own has caused him to yield his own personality and masculinity to Sappho.

Later in the volume we can see this death-bringing symbolic castration vividly and actually occurring. In “Dolores” attention is drawn to ancient cult religions: “Cottyto, / Astarte, Astoreth...” that demand such sacrifices. In the poem the muse takes on the persona of Cybele: “From the midmost of Ida, from shady recesses that murmur at morn, / They have brought and baptized her, Our Lady, A goddess new-born.” Cybele is the goddess for whom Attis castrated

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<sup>18</sup> In her discussion of Burne-Jones' depiction of the poem, Kathy Psomiades comments on a similar effacing of the male by the female: “the knights are barely distinguishable from one another. Femininity and the space it occupies is visually appealing, varied, filled with jewel-like colours. Masculinity and the tiny space it is allowed is undifferentiated, gray” (91-92).

himself, and as we saw in Chapter 2, Swinburne identified himself with Attis through his own treatment at the hands of a metamorphosing Sapphic dominatrix. Now as a poet himself he will again sharpen “the flint of Atys” and subject himself to the cruelty of the Sapphic muse who will not only castrate him, but will demand the ultimate price, since he now hails Cybele as “queen over death and the dead.”<sup>19</sup> Such effects did not escape the notice of the critics: Thomas Baynes comments in the Edinburgh Review: “The writers of this school appear to delight in extreme physical experiences – ecstasies and horrors – for their own sake, or rather for the sake of the morbid appetite they create and help for the moment to gratify”(95).

It is in the meeting of poet and muse in the poem “At Eleusis” that the business of castration becomes most clearly conflated with death and I now look at the poem in some detail. Eleusis is a fitting meeting place for this enactment, since it was there with the connivance of the muses that the Sacred Mysteries were carried out, rituals involving rape and murder.<sup>20</sup> Eliding into the persona of Demeter as easily as Demeter elides into the figure of “an old sick woman, lamed and lean”, the muse demonstrates the disfigurement necessary to the poet. In order to “exalt him past the flame of stars,” Demeter takes the sleeping child Triptolemos and “bared the gracious limbs and the soft feet, / Unswaddled the weak hands, and in mid-ash / Laid the sweet flesh of either feeble side.” Her plan is to “purge him to full god”, the fire signifying divine inspiration. Demeter’s action is misunderstood by the child’s mother, Metaneira, who is incapable of seeing the true nature of the divine, and snatches the child from the flames and thus deprives him of his “strong inheritance” of divinity, so that he reverts to being “mortal fallen anew”. He can not now become fully divine. However, all is not lost, having been touched by fire, Triptolemos grows to a maturity in which the power of Dionysus is implicated: “From bud of beard to pale-grey

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<sup>19</sup> In the chapter “Masculinity under Threat?” Don Fowler shows Catullus himself undergoing an identical process, as in the poem “Attis” he conflates the cruelty of his mistress *Lesbia* and the power of his muse, a poetic exercise that results in the poet’s loss of masculinity (158-9).

<sup>20</sup> Hardie draws attention to the ancient association between the Muses, Demeter, and the Eleusinian Mysteries: “Euripides’ *Helen* (1339-52) gives a syncretic account of Eleusinian music which links Cybele with Demeter and introduces the Muses as hymnal *choreia*” (17); he argues for an etymological connection between “moustikoi” as servants of the Muses with “mustoi” as servants of Demeter (12-17).

flower of hair / Shall wax vinewise to a lordly vine, whose grapes, / Bleed the red heavy blood of swoln soft wine.” Only at his death, will he becomes a part of the holy rites of Demeter: “...this Celeus dead and swathed / Purple and pale for golden burial, / Shall be your helper in my services...”

This needs some explication: Demeter is the goddess of fertility, but in association with the poet, her fertility will take the form of poetic creativity; she seeks to disfigure “castrate” Triptolemus, just as the muse castrates the poet by imposing her superior female power as she emerges from the id, but meeting with resistance from the super ego (Metenaira), she is only partly successful in forming a poet who will express her libido; only by expunging him absolutely, will she achieve the kind of service that she needs. Only when the poet yields up his whole personality to her, “dead and swathed”, will the muse properly be able to express herself – and his libido. However, in the process the poet has lost his human identity, in himself he is nothing, his role reduced to “helper” in the muse’s “services.” Indeed Swinburne’s subjection to his muse was readily discerned by one critic at least: in the middle of his hostile polemic Robert Buchanan unintentionally pinpoints exactly what has happened: “When we find a writer like the author of these *Poems and Ballads*.... who has no splendid individual emotions to reveal....we may safely affirm, in the face of many pages of brilliant writing, that such a man is either no poet at all, or a poet utterly and miserably lost to the Muses” (Hyder TCH 31). While nobody could deny that Swinburne *was* a poet, it was true that he could not experience “individual emotions”; however, his submission, not by the muses as a whole, but by his Sapphic muse as she came to possess him, was the factor that enabled the “many pages of brilliant writing.”

In their various encounters we have seen the muse subject the poet to necrophilia, emasculation and castration in her intent to bring him to death, to proclaim her triumph over him, and to prolong the libidinous energy and make the beautiful moment eternal. In her final triumph she has produced “that state of ‘constant gratification’ where no tension is felt – a state without want, where the Pleasure Principle and Nirvana Principle converge” (186-7). This is a state where rational thought and the intervention of the superego no longer operate. Indeed, the psychologist Anthony Storr uses “The Garden of Proserpine” in order to exemplify such a state”

(66-7). I now look more closely at the poem to show that it is the Sapphic Muse that presides over it. She has again chosen her favoured topos of the garden, and this time elided into the goddess of the Underworld, and has adopted the persona of the wan motionless figure of goddess: "Pale, beyond porch and portal, / Crowned with calm leaves, she stands." She presides over death as she "waits for all men born." The poet exhausted by the pain that has been inflicted on him by the muse, welcomes his death as he lies in the Garden of Proserpine:

I am tired of tears and laughter,  
And men that laugh and weep  
Of what may come hereafter  
For men that sow to reap:  
I am weary of days and hours,  
Blown buds of barren flowers,  
Desires and dreams and powers  
And everything but sleep.

As a result of the force of the libido and the Nirvana Principle, the poet submits to the overwhelming power of the muse who will take his selfhood from him; now he positions himself amongst "dead winds", "spent waves", "doubtful dreams of dreams", and "blown buds of barren flowers"; he signifies his acceptance of this state and even gives thanks for it: "We thank with brief thanksgiving whatever gods may be." As Fletcher comments he has reached a state like the centre of indifference passed through by Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh (Gardens and Grim Ravines 202); but he will not pass through it. His death has made dream, inertia, torpor and semi-consciousness his chosen topos, (or rather those chosen for the poet by the muse), topos hitherto associated exclusively with the passivity of the female. This setting is not new: a similar ambience of drug-induced hallucination had been employed by Tennyson in "Song of the Lotos-Eaters" (The New Oxford Book of English Verse, 643). However, in Tennyson's poem we are persuaded to believe the Lotos-Eaters are misguided, and that "the beds of amarynth and moly" are only transient spaces from which the protagonists will depart when they have come to their senses. The real topos of the poem is, it seems to me, Ithaca itself, which

signifies a locus of accepted manly behaviour, where men do men's work and live in proper domestic harmony, and to which the lotos eaters will eventually return. In "The Garden of Proserpine", on the other hand, "sleep and death" are, as it were, the Lotos-eaters' Ithaca; they are the only end: "Only the sleep eternal / In an eternal night."<sup>21</sup> This is the desired consummation, the Nirvana: "Then star nor sun shall waken, / Nor any change of light / Nor sound of waters shaken / Nor any sound or sight." It is to Sappho's "night's black sleep" (Fragments 149 and 151), to which the poet finally submits. Swinburne's Sapphic muse now compels him to adopt a role so passive that he is to all intents and purposes, inanimate, serving only as channel of the muse. And it is, fittingly, in the poem "Sapphics" that I want to show how this is finally explicated.

In the first two stanzas the Sapphic muse chooses the death-like topos of semi-consciousness from which to emerge from the libido and to encounter the poet: "All night long sleep came not upon my eyelids, /.... Then to me so lying awake a vision / Came without sleep..." The fact that the vision has come from "over the seas" immediately suggests a Sapphic provenance. The following three stanzas refer to the poet's sighting of the vision who has taken the form of Aphrodite, an indication that his libido is aroused; but abruptly the poem's focus changes as the Sapphic muse makes her appearance and sets about diverting the libido into verse.

Now the poem is no longer concerned with the poet as an individual, he has served his purpose: he has introduced the muse/vision, but has now been reduced to the role of narrator; his business is to be the mouthpiece that proclaims the muse's superior power, a power that is greater than "the crowned nine muses" whose crowns "are faded", and which must give way to the *Sapphic* muse. It is not long before Aphrodite and her attendant loves must also cede their divine power, because the muse has usurped Aphrodite's sexual pre-eminence, and continues to turn the libido into lyric: "...the tenth [muse] sang wonderful things they [the muses] knew not"; she silences other muses, other sources of inspiration: "the nine were silent"; and as she sees off Aphrodite

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<sup>21</sup> In his article "Swinburne" John D. Rosenberg comments on the masterly way in which the effect is achieved: "...the blurring generic plurals, the muted imagery and the female rhymes all evoke the pause in being...." (Victorian Poetry 134).

and her attendants, “fearful wings of doves departing”, she completes the poetic orgasm and declares her supremacy: “Newly fledged, her visible song, a marvel, / Made of perfect sound and exceeding passion /...”; she has eternalised the beautiful moment: “such a song was that song.”

The muse has turned the libido into verse; she has employed the poet to achieve her own triumphant embodiment, but the cost to him has been great: her overwhelming dominatrical power has robbed him of his sexuality and she has obliterated the man’s selfhood; as he expresses her song, he becomes even less than Baudelaire’s Lesbian “sentinelle” “au sommet de Leucate” (“Lesbos”), without masculinity or personality, or even life, he has become identified as one of the “ghosts of outcast women [who] return lamenting.” Prins, commenting on Thomas Hardy’s “A Singer Asleep” sees the poet endorsing this: “He imagines Swinburne repeating the rhythms of Sappho fallen into a sea “where none sees”, dissolving into the waves like Sappho, and sighing as a phantom to her spectral form” (121). He has been broken by the battering of the muse, and now is nothing more than a conduit of Sapphic lyric, uttering “songs that break the heart of the earth with pity.”

This is the price he has paid for his possession by Sappho. Just as in his actual life he has accepted that he will not live as a sentient individual male, but will operate through text found on “the dusty shelves of libraries”, worship a long- dead muse and substitute her for a sexual partner, so in verse, subsumed by Sappho, he has abrogated his selfhood and ceased to exist apart from her. In “The Triumph of Time” he openly acknowledges this as he allows himself to be “dissolved into the waves”, into the body of the muse which is now elided into the sea itself, and finally resigns himself to her total possession of him as a poet, as she has of him as a man, since only in this way will he express his libido and have it eternalised in verse, have his “soul set free”. Now he no longer has any voice of his own, but instead, like Celeus, must serve as a mere instrument of a divine being. As a mouthpiece of Sappho, he will take on a role akin to the Pythia at Delphi, a conduit of divine inspiration and song. The significance of this will be the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5 THE SAPPHIC SIBYL

In the previous chapter we saw the muse obtain a position of supremacy as the poet was subjected to necrophilia, castration and finally a loss of identity so absolute, that he was reduced to being no more than a mouthpiece of the muse and her constructs. What, then, will this reading mean for our understanding of Poems and Ballads:1? In this chapter I shall be looking at Swinburne in the light of a mouthpiece of divine inspiration, a kind of Sapphic Pythia or Sibyl, and I shall be examining the nature of the verse and the effect on the poet, and his contemporary audience and when he takes on this role.

### **The Poet as Sibyl**

The relationship between Swinburne and Sappho, between poet and muse, between id and ego, was not unlike that between Apollo and his mouthpieces, the Pythia, the Sibyl or Cassandra, and I begin this chapter by considering Swinburne's position as analogous to that of the Pythia. We can see that Swinburne associated the poet with the figure of the Pythia from his comments on William Blake:

“ Now the matter in hand is touched with something of an epic style; the narrative and characters lose half their hidden sense, and the reciter passes from the prophetic tripod to the seat of a common singer” (CW: 14: 237).

That he was drawn to enacting the role of Pythia can be seen from this description of his recitation provided by the eye-witness, Gosse: “...in the concentrated emphasis of his slow utterance he achieved something like the real Delphic ecstasy, the transformation of the Pythia quivering on her tripod” (P&S 51). Speaking of the Delphic priestess, E.J. Dodds describes just such a process: “the Pythia became ‘entheos, plena deo’ [inspired, full of the divine]: the god entered into her and used her vocal chords as if they were his own, exactly as the so-called

“control” does in modern spirit-mediumship”(70).<sup>1</sup> A further description of Swinburne by Gosse brings the similarity even closer: “Under the agitation of his own thoughts he became like a man possessed, with quivering hands, eyes thrown up and voice hollowed into a kind of echoing chant” (Lang: 6: 233-4). A Pythia, indeed. In The Double Tongue William Golding imaginatively recreates the feelings of the Pythia as she undergoes this possession:

I felt it was the god who helped me then to crawl towards it [the tripod] and lay hands on the thick, cruel bronze of its ankles. I climbed a mountain, groaning, sometimes wailing, but now there was no escape. The god would have me there in the holy seat whether I would or no, oh yes, it was rape, this was Apollo who fitted me on the seat, twisted me anyway he would, then left me. (88)

Such a description of Apollo’s treatment of the Pythia finds a parallel in the effect of Sappho on Swinburne, since in each case the master or mistress (Apollo or Sappho) use sadism and aberrant sexuality to force poetic utterance from their victim. Like Golding’s Pythia, Swinburne has “climbed a mountain groaning”, in his case it was Culver Cliff, and this too led him towards his torturer and source of inspiration. Like Apollo, in his rape of Cassandra, Sappho has taken advantage of Swinburne’s sexuality by substituting herself for an actual woman and utilizing his libido for verse. Each victim must utter as their master or mistress requires. Another of Apollo’s victims undergoing similar treatment, was the sibyl, and it is with a comparison of the role of sibyl at the hands of Apollo, and the poet Swinburne at the hands of Sappho, that I shall be concerned in this chapter.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W.H. Mallock describes Swinburne performing such a role through a similar medium-like trance: “His audience who knew these three poems [“Dolores”, “Garden of Proserpine” and “Triumph of Time”] held their breath as they listened to the poet’s own voice imparting its living tones to the passages....Then, like a man waking from a dream, Swinburne turned to our host, ‘Can you give me another glass of wine?’” (Unpublished Letters 57-58).

<sup>2</sup> That Victorians regarded the figure of the Pythia and the Sibyl as readily interchangeable can be seen from the work of Burne-Jones who had become interested in the subject: “Two figures were turned into oil paintings, Burne-Jones for some reason transposing their identification; the Delphic sibyl in the Jesus college window became the Cumaean sibyl ... while the Cumaean equates with the oil known as Sibylla Delphica” (Wildman and Christian 177). It is quite possible that Swinburne’s admiration for Shelley had brought him into contact with Mary Shelley’s “The Last Man” and that he was familiar with “The Author’s Introduction” with its description of the descent into the Sibyl’s cave.



The equating of sibyl and poet is not new: Robert Herrick, whom Swinburne describes “as the greatest song-writer” (Hyder SAC 181) claims: “Thus enrag’d my lines are hurl’d / Like the sybell’s through the world” (“Not every Day Fit for Verse” 190). In fact Herrick anticipates Swinburne’s treatment by the Sapphic muse, he, too, is “enraged”, possessed by a similar torturing treatment at the hand of his muse. Madame de Staël (herself connected with Sappho through her novel Corinne, see Chapter 1), makes a connection between the poet and the sibyl: “And of any true poet, it may be said that he conceives his whole poem at once in his soul, were it not for the difficulties of language, he would, like the sibyl and the prophets improvise the sacred hymns of genius” (De l’ Allemagne 144). In “Notes on Some Pictures of 1868” Swinburne makes an interesting juxtaposition of siren and sibyl: he draws attention to two pictures by Rossetti: “I know of none greater than his two latest, these are types of sensual beauty and spiritual, the siren and the sibyl” (CW 15: 211). In fact, he can be regarded as equating the enticing sexual presence of the siren with the libidinous muse, while the sibyl performs the function of the poet to interpret the divine message.

In order to explore the analogy of poet as Sapphic sibyl, I shall utilise Virgil’s descriptions of the Cumaean Sibyl in the third and sixth books of the Aeneid as an analogy. I regard this as particularly apposite since Virgil had formed the Roman bedrock of Swinburne’s grounding in the Classics at Eton, and moreover, the Pre-Raphaelites had a particular interest in the work.<sup>3</sup> By an analysis of this analogy, I shall proceed to examine the poetics that must evolve when the poet takes on such a persona.

I start by comparing Virgil’s depiction of the Sibyl struggling at the hands of Apollo (a) with that of Anactoria (whom, as we have seen in the previous chapter acts as a signifier for Swinburne), at the hands of Sappho (b).

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<sup>3</sup> In 1872 Burne-Jones began a series of drawings of the Sibyl. In the following year he was to write: “You may think of Morris and me together – he reads a book to me and I make drawings for a big Virgil he is drawing” (Wildman and Christian (172). Morris translated six books of the Aeneid and Burne-Jones’ drawings were inscribed on the vellum of a large folio. Although this was occurring in 1870s it seems reasonable to assume the Aeneid was already a familiar presence in the circle and that Sibyl was of especial interest. See also previous footnote.

a)

...Cumea Sibylla  
horrendas canit ambages antroque remugit,  
obscuris vera involvens; ea frena furenti  
concutit et stimulos sub pectore vertit Apollo.  
ut primum cessit furor, et rabida ora quierunt ....(Aeneid 6: 98 - 102)

The Cumaean Sibyl sings out her awe-inspiring Mysteries and she moans from within the cave mixing together truth with the arcane; as she rages, so does Apollo shake the reins and he plies the goad beneath her breast, as soon as her fury ceases and her mad lips fall silent...<sup>4</sup>

b)

Would I not hurt thee perfectly?....  
.....  
Strike pang from pang as note is struck from note,  
Catch the sob's middle music in thy throat,

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<sup>4</sup> I shall also refer to two other sections from the book:

...deus, ecce, deus! cui talia fanti  
ante fores subito non vultus, non color unus,  
non comptae mansere comae; sed pecus anhelum,  
et rabie fera corda tument, maiorque videri  
nec mortale sonans, adflata est numine quando  
iam proprio dei. (46- 51)

“The god! Behold the god!” As she spoke such words before the entrance, suddenly neither her face nor colour was the same, nor did her hair remained arranged, but her panting breast and fierce spirit swelled with passion, and she seemed greater, uttering sound that was not mortal, since she was filled with the power of the god as he now drew nearer.”

at Phoebi nondum patiens, immanis in antro  
bacchatur vates, magnum si pectore possit  
excussisse deum; tanto magis ille fatigat  
os rabidum, fera corda domans, fingitque premendo. (77-80)

“But not yet yielding to Apollo, the prophetess raves, unearthly in the cave, striving to shake off the great god from her breast, but all the more, he exhausts her raging mouth, taming her fierce heart and moulds her with his pressing.”

Take thy limbs living, and new-mould with these  
A lyre of many faultless agonies?

.....  
With perfect pangs convulse thy perfect mouth,  
Make thy life shudder in thee and burn afresh,  
And wring thy very spirit through the flesh? (“Anactoria” 135-143)

In “Anactoria” there is the same painful utterance forced on the mouthpiece by the superior power: instead of the Sibyl’s echoing moan (“remugit”) there is the “pang as note is struck from note” and “the sob’s middle music in thy throat”; there is a replication of the cruelty of this superior power: Sappho declares that she would “With perfect pangs *convulse* thy perfect mouth, / Make thy life *shudder* in thee and burn afresh”, thus echoing Virgil’s metaphor of horse-breaking: “fatigat os”: (“exhausts her mouth”) and “frena concutit”: “shakes the reins”. There is the same forced moulding: Apollo (“fingitque premento”) “moulds [the sibyl] by controlling”, while Swinburne’s Sappho will “Take thy limbs living, and new-mould with these /A lyre of many faultless agonies.” The purpose of each superior power is the same: to bring about the divine utterance, in the case of the Sibyl: “obscuris vera involvens” (“mixing the truth with the arcane”), while Sappho aims to “wring thy very spirit through the flesh.” The lyre is a signifier of the lyric power both for Apollo and of Sappho, and both are associated with the turning of the sexual into the sublime: Apollo denied sexual favours by the sibyl, forces her instead to divine utterance, while Swinburne’s libido/Sapphic muse denied a natural outlet, turns to force the poet to utter verse. To put it another way, Apollo’s represents the Super ego that seeks to control the libido emerging from the id. When the Sibyl cries out: “Deus, ecce deus!”, she acknowledges the divine power of Apollo. It is his sexual agency, whether operating through the Pythia, Sibyl or Cassandra that enables the utterance.

But does this struggle not exclude Sappho? Is Swinburne not making direct communion with Apollo, whom he would define as “the spirit or influence informing the thought or the soul of man with inner light” (Lang 3: 142), and bypassing Sappho? While Swinburne longed to connect with this primeval source of song, there were difficulties: in the first place although this

signifier of song and light was *intellectually* attractive to Swinburne, the various defining characteristics of the god were less so. J.C. Stobart comments, “Healing, harp-music and lyric poetry, discipline and morality fostered by the Delphic oracle, and the Dorian government of Sparta, Argos and Messina – these are the gifts of Apollo to Greece” (63). As the god who exemplifies moderation and measured behaviour and whose muses bring about law and order “εὐνομία”, he was much less attractive to Swinburne than his counterpart Dionysus, who brought with him the accompanying maenads.<sup>5</sup> And again, light, Apollo’s defining characteristic, is less privileged in Poems and Ballads:1 than the Sappho-associated shadows of darkness and death, (as we saw in Chapters 2 and 3). Like Swinburne’s old male heroes, the god could be treated as a source of idolatry, but he could not satisfy the yearnings of Swinburne after the glittering other, or act as a surrogate sexual object and perform the role of mistress, as Sappho had done. The god was another Burton, glorious and heroic, but “too much” for him. At the time of writing Poems and Ballads:1 Sappho, not Apollo was the “spiritual influence” that really “informed” him, it was she, not Apollo who was the source of “inner light”, and it was her own particular light, her glittering otherness that had possessed Swinburne. Would she then act as a sort of middle-woman between him and the sublimity of Apollo? Sappho was certainly well-suited for providing such a link. She had close affiliations with Apollo since the muses are naturally the god’s children; she shares his lyre. She was also connected with Apollo through Aeschylus’ trope of the nightingale (see Chapter 2), and Swinburne introduces this connection in “On The Cliffs”: “*Ah, ah, the doom* (thou knowest whence rang that wail) / *Of the shrill nightingale.*” Through the trope of the nightingale Swinburne links Sappho to Cassandra, and both to Apollo, since the women are mouthpieces of the god, Sappho (irrespective of her role as muse) because she is a divine singer, and Cassandra, because she has obtained her gift of prophecy from him: “Who thought with craft to mock the god most high, / And win by wiles his crown of prophecy.”<sup>6</sup> In the poem, Sappho’s heritage of Apollo is acknowledged; she has taken

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<sup>5</sup> “Tis Apollo that allotteth to men and to women remedies for sore diseases. Twas he that gave the cithern and bestoweth the Muse on whoever he will, bringing into the heart the love of law that hateth strife” (Pythian Odes 5: 85-90).

<sup>6</sup> This echoes lines from Aeschylus’ Agamemnon: “...I yielded, / Then at the climax I recoiled – I deceived Apollo” (123 - 4).

on the signifying solar power of the male god: she is described as “spirit of the sun”, and the poem will conclude with the words: “And in thine heart, where love and song make strife, / Fire everlasting of eternal life.” It is through Sappho, not Apollo that Swinburne has gained “the sense of all the sea.”

Just as Apollo passes his gifts paternally to the muses or violently to Cassandra/Sappho, or to the Pythia or the Sibyl, so Sappho will relay these gifts on to Swinburne. In the poem Swinburne acknowledges this: “My heart as thy heart was in me, as thee / Fire.” However, she will do this in her own way: she will mimic Cassandra’s possession by Apollo through the sadism she employs in her possession of Swinburne: like her, he will “burn and bleed” (170); we can compare Cassandra’s reaction to Apollo in Aeschylus: “His fire – / sears me, sweeps me again – the torture! / Apollo Lord of Light, you burn, / you blind me – / Agony! (1269-72) with Swinburne’s reaction to the muse in the opening words in “Anactoria”: “My life is bitter with thy love; thine eyes / Blind me, thy tresses burn me, thy sharp sighs / Divide my flesh.” We can then see Sappho as link in a chain that connects Swinburne to Sappho and Sappho to Apollo, like that described by Plato in Ion.<sup>7</sup>

However, in spite of these obvious links, I do not, like Yisrael Levin, in his article “The Terror of Divine Revelation and Apollo’s Incorporation into Song: Swinburne’s Apollonian Myth” (145), regard Sappho as a mere manifestation of Apollo for Swinburne, and I am unconvinced by the arguments of Morgan who claims “the source of creativity in Swinburne’s poetics is not at all the centrally featured feminine figure of Sappho, but rather the hidden masculine figure of Apollo who speaks through her, as does the male poet himself” (“Violence, Creativity and the Feminine” 100). If the feminine figure of Sappho is centrally placed, how can the shadowy

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<sup>7</sup> “There’s an enormous chain of choral dancers and dance teachers and assistant teachers hanging off to the sides of the rings that are suspended from the muse. One poet is attached to one muse, another to another...from these first rings, from the poets, they are attached in their turn and inspired. ...the god pulls peoples’ souls through all these [rings] whenever he wants, looping the power down from one to another” (536a).

For a discussion of this link with relation to Swinburne and male effeminisation, see Maxwell (189-90).

figure of Apollo be pre-eminent? The critic, Raymond, states: “Swinburne’s primary assumption [is] that Apollo is the external and eternal source of art. Without his ‘fire everlasting’ even Sappho would be silent” (140), but she is forced to conclude: “The nature of the Sapphic hymns indicate other requisites and these include songs to Atthis and human love as well as those celebrating Aphrodite.” I must, then, agree with Maxwell, who comments “in Swinburne’s mythology, all authentic song derives from Sappho’s song” (42). When Apollo passes his gifts to the Sapphic muse, she will reconfigure the nature of the sublime. And when Swinburne is “quivering on the tripod” and filled with “real Delphic ecstasy”, it is Sappho’s reconfiguration of Apollo that inspires him, it is *her* sublime of which he speaks. What then will be the nature of this Sapphic-Sibyline verse?

In The Mirror and the Lamp, M.H. Abrams discusses various expressive theories and shows how the Romantics had laid emphasis on what is, in effect, unconscious utterance, and he cites the comments of two of Swinburne’s most admired poets. Referring to Shelley’s “Defence of Poetry” 153, he comments: “Shelley insists that valid poetic composition is uncontrollable, automatic and ineffably joyous”(192). And he points to Blake comment: “I write when commanded by the spirits, and the moment I have written, I see the words fly about the room in all directions” (Poetry and Prose 809). For the early and middle Victorians, there continued to be a general consensus of opinion that poetic utterance was the direct result of welling emotion; George Lewes, for example, asserts that “poetry is the metrical utterance of emotion”(“Hegel’s Aesthetics” 56); Mill asks: “What is poetry but the thoughts and words of emotion spontaneously embodying itself?” (“Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties” 38). Furthermore, he sees the importance of poetic possession and castigates Wordsworth because “he never seems *possessed* by any feeling; no emotion seems ever so strong as to have entire sway for the time being, over the current of his thoughts” (41; emphasis added). In his implicit assertion of the need for possession he might have been describing the possession of the Sibyl by Apollo, or Swinburne by Sappho, since he is certainly under the sway of the muse who has control over “the current of his thoughts”. However, Swinburne’s own enthusiasm is something more than mere unconscious utterance, it is the result of being constrained by the force of the escaping libido, and the verse issues as a result of a sexual encounter like the utterance of Virgil’s sibyl:

“pectus anhelum, / et rabie fera corda tument, maiorque videri / nec mortale sonans, adflata est numine quando / iam proprio dei. (6: 48- 51) whose “panting breast and fierce spirit swelled with passion and she seemed greater, not sounding mortal as she was filled with the power of the god as he came nearer”. This insistent, thrusting, yet *hidden* sexual impulse, is something that Walter Bagehot dimly descibes already emerging in Robert Browning: “...that strong something, that inner secret something” (The National Review, 644). But it is perhaps John Keble who, as Abrams comments, offers a proto-Freudian theory (147), and who comes nearest to describing “that inner secret something”, when he speaks of the supremacy of that “class of primary poets who spontaneously moved by impulse, resort to composition for relief and solace of a burdened or overwrought mind” (“Lectures on Poetry”: 87-8).<sup>8</sup> In fact he exactly describes factor c), Sappho’s role as refuge and substitute sexual mistress. He adds: it is “the art which under certain veils and disguises....reveals the fervent emotions of the mind.” However, he stipulates that these should be balanced by “noble and natural requirements of reticence and shame”, “by an instinctive delicacy which recoils from expressing them openly, as feeling that they can never meet with full sympathy” (88). But Sappho’s presence in Poems and Ballads:1 did away with these requirements, and permitted Swinburne, as his oriental disguise had permitted Burton, to throw off these shackles, and to actually valorise the unspeakable; and allowed an honest outing of what had been comfortably and euphemistically referred to as “the sympathies”. Isobel Armstrong offers examples of vocabulary that was used to express critical approval for the portrayal of emotion: “human, sympathy, the sympathies, the affections, feelings, heart, natural, simple, vigour, healthful, manly, noble distinct/distinctness” (Victorian Scrutinies 6). Such words skirt around the sexual and try to assert an asexuality. Poems and Ballads: 1 however, records a very different emotional state since it is unashamedly proclaims the thrusting of the libido in the form of the dominant muse, and reveals and proclaims what Swinburne lauds in Hugo: “the very heart and mystery of darkness”(CW 15: 4). It has effected what Bishop Louth, as far back as 1753 had discovered in Hebrew poetry.

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<sup>8</sup> Byron had spoken in a similar vein of “lava of the imagination whose eruption prevents an earthquake. They say that poets never or rarely go mad.... But are generally so near it that I can’t help thinking that rhyme is so far useful in anticipating and preventing a disaster” (Letter to Miss Milbanke 10<sup>th</sup> Nov 1813, 405).

Frequently, instead of disguising the secret feelings of the author, it lays them quite open to the public view; and the veil being as it were, suddenly removed these affections and emotions of the soul, its sudden impulses, its hasty sallies and irregularities, are conspicuously displayed.”(156)

And this was exactly what made the volume so dangerous: “the sallies and irregularities” were recognized as familiar. Thomas Spencer Baynes, for example, writing in the Edinburgh Review, identifies Louth’s “affections and emotions of the soul, its sudden impulses, its hasty sallies and irregularities” with the presence of the surging libido. He expostulates: “His pages are stinging nerves, burning veins, and thundering pulses; of physical influences and sensuous agitations that dazzle and blind, deafen and stun, torture and stupefy ”(90). Yet, in these comments he unwittingly echoes Longinius’ description of the Sapphic sublime.<sup>9</sup> Not only does he reiterate the Sapphic emphasis on the sexual and the aberrant, but unwittingly he describes his own hungry response to it: it is as much *his* pulse that thunders, his “sensuous agitations” (whatever they are!) that are set in motion, it is he that is “tortured”, “dazzled” and “stupefied” by these outed intimations of the libido.

It was, to say the least, disconcerting for the male reader to find that what had been hitherto safely coded as “affections and emotions of the soul” was now triumphantly deciphered by the presence of Sappho. In their encounters with the poet’s subconscious, the readers were made to stand, like Sappho, on the top of the Leucadian cliff and gag at the dizzying depths below, or like Swinburne, as he looked down from the top of Culver Cliff (“I knew it would be certain death if I looked down” (Gordon 15); they were in fact being forced to look at Sappho’s “night’s black sleep” (Fragment 151), Carlyle’s feared area of “the bottomless boundless Deep” (“Characteristics”; Works 28:3). It is this insistence that the topos of art lies within the dark subconscious and that as such, it will evoke an automatic reciprocal response from within the

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<sup>9</sup> “Are you not amazed how one and the same moment she seeks out soul, body, hearing, tongue, sight, complexion as though they had all left her and were external, and how in contradiction she both freezes and burns?”



reader's own subconscious, that was so provocative, and from which the critics tried so violently to distance themselves, as we shall see demonstrated more explicitly in the following chapter.

Yet there was an even more terrifying aspect to this unconscious utterance of Swinburne's: because of the dominance of the Sapphic muse and the poet's reduction to being her mouthpiece, it constituted a terrifying female utterance, as Buchanan was bitterly to acknowledge in the Atheneum: "He is quite the Absalom of modern bards – long-ringed, down-cheeked, flippant-lipped, down-cheeked, amorous-lidded" (Hyder TCH 31). As the libido belonged to the Sapphic muse, so the sibyl belonged to the antrum, her utterance "remugit antro", echoes back from *the cave*" (99), and the reader was taken inside the epicentre of overwhelming female power. As Gilbert and Gubar comment:

...the womb-shaped cave is also the place of female power, the *umbilicus mundi*, one of the great antechambers of the mysteries of transformation. As herself a kind of cave, every woman might seem to have the cave's metaphorical power of annihilation, the power – as de Beauvoir puts it elsewhere– of "night in the entrails of the earth," for "in many a legend," she notes, "we see the hero lost forever as he falls back into the maternal shadows – cave, abyss, hell" (95).

Such a cave belongs to the Cumaean sibyl: "the deep cave was awful, and rugged with a vast gaping mouth."<sup>10</sup> We might compare lines from "The Caves of Sark": "All under the deeps of the darkness are glimmering; All over impends / An immeasurable infinite flower of the dark that dilates and descends" (33-34). And in Poems and Ballads:1 the reader was constantly to be brought within "the night of the entrails of the earth", not simply through the Sibyl, but through the muse's constantly drawing him within terrifying enclosed sexualised female spaces. The "cave" takes many forms: for example, as we saw in the Chapter 3, it can be seen in the enclosed female areas of the subverted hortus conclusus, as demonstrated in "Ballad of Life", "The Two Dreams" "In the Orchard" and "The Garden of Proserpine". This threatening dark

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<sup>10</sup> "spelunca alta fuit vastoque immanis hiatu / scrupula" (237-8).

female interiority can be viewed again in the “innermost vanes” of Dolores’ chapels or inside the horsel in “Laus Veneris” where “the air is hot.” Like Tannhäuser, both poet and reader may try to escape from this darkness within: “I came forth / Like a man blind and naked in strange lands,” yet he must return to it: “For I came home right heavy with small cheer.” It is the fear of the cave that Alfred Austin exhibits in his critique, “Mr Swinburne”, when he finds the male-proffered unthreatening substitute “caves” have been deserted: “the feminine element [is] no longer in the nursery, the drawing-room or the conjugal chamber, but unrestrainedly rioting in any and every arena of life in which an indiscriminating imagination chooses to place it” (Hyder TCH 104). He hastens to deny the Pythia and her cave: “Great art is to be reached *only* through spontaneity, simplicity, faith, unconscious earnestness and *manly* concentration” (emphasis added). But this very list of essentials has something hysterical about it; Austin senses the presence of the Pythia in her cave, in the verse of the volume – and in himself.<sup>11</sup>

“Before the Mirror” is a lyrical exercise that draws the reader behind “the veil forbidden / Shut up from sight”; as Maxwell comments, “It lures us in” (Swinburne 33); it entices the reader inside the uncharted area of dark female interiority, and as we saw in Chapter 3 the poem is intimately connected with Sappho. The title is ambiguous since it is not only the woman who is “before the mirror”, but the reader who must also gaze at a very complex interiority, since not only are we to look at the woman herself, but also at her reflection, and the very reflection reflects back to events from her past: “Deep in the gleaming glass / She sees all past things pass, / And all sweet life that was lie down and lie.” But the act of gazing at this dark interiority is also the act of reading lyric. As Maxwell asks: “what does it mean ‘for all sweet life to lie down and lie’, if not become the fiction, the transformed work achieved by the mirror of art and the aesthetic observer?” (Swinburne 39). The reader is invited, to conflate lyric with a dizzying array of reflections, “formless gleams”, not unlike Carlyle’s description of the Hall of Mirrors:

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<sup>11</sup> Maxwell draws attention to such an effect in “Pasiphae”: “Centred by a fierce female desire for sexual satisfaction, the poem seems obsessed with interiors and inner space... By a kind of empathetic process, the revelation made by Daedalus to the excitedly responsive Pasiphae makes the reader imaginatively assimilate her condition” (SSAS 92).

In the pale light each mirror reflects, convexly or concavely, not only some real object, but the shadows of this in other mirrors; which again do the like for it: till in such reflection and reflection the whole immensity is filled with dimmer and dimmer shapes; and no firm scene lies around us, but a dislocated distorted chaos, fading away on all hands, in the distance into utter night. (Works 27: 220)

However, while Carlyle's reflections attempt to somehow encompass "primeval truths", "Before the Mirror" makes a series of receding reflections that move back and back into an engulfing shadowy, specifically female space. Moreover, as the woman in the poem continues to gaze in the mirror, the reflections become interchangeable with her own self: "Art thou the ghost, my sister, / White sister there, / Am I the ghost, who knows?" But the readers are also the viewers, and thus the darkness of the feminine reflections becomes indistinguishable from those of their own subconscious. In our quotation Virgil uses the words "remugit antro"; the prefix "re" indicates not one echoing from within the Pythia's cave, but an echoing *back* (Aeneid 6: 99).

Not only is Poems and Ballads:1 an expression of the libido taking the female form of the Sapphic muse, associated with the maenad's Bacchic fury, but the uncontrollable force of the libido and the violence it must utilise, will also associate it with madness; the utterance will come from "rabida ora", lips like those of the Pythia which express both madly and madness. The anonymous critic of the Pall Mall Gazette is all too ready to describe Swinburne's utterances in the volume in terms of madness:

His enemy might say without fear that this is the product of a brain that has become disordered in one particular by constant dwelling on lascivious images. It brings to mind the most shocking spectacle that human nature ever presents, in the case of certain poor creatures who in lunatic asylums display a subtlety and fancy in lewdness which appall people who keep their senses...it *must* be called madness.  
(10)

The critic uses the term “madness” as a derogatory term, but madness had long been regarded as a necessary state for the poet and was, after all, only an extreme form of enthymia, a necessary component of lyric. In the fifth century BC Demodocus held that the finest poems were composed “with inspiration and a holy breath” and denied that it was possible to be a great poet “sine furore” (Dodds 82). In the Phaedrus Plato has Socrates draw attention particularly to “the madness of those who are possessed by the Muses; which taking hold of a delicate and virgin soul, and there inspiring frenzy, and awakens lyrical and other numbers with these” (245a). Abrams comments on the presence of divine madness as a given in Romantic poetics: “the common assumption that irrational or inexplicable occurrences, such as inspiration, divine madness, or lucky graces are indispensable conditions of the greatest utterances” (7). Nearer to Swinburne’s own time Hazlitt writes, “It is the music of language answering music of the mind.....There is a near connection between music and deep rooted passion; mad people sing” (12).<sup>12</sup>

It was not just the case of poets defending their own territory, such necessary madness had medical sanction: Henry Maudsley, pioneer of mental health care, writing in the 1860s, and remarkably precursing the Freudian discourse discussed in the previous chapter, comments, “the insane temperament may, according to the direction of its development, conduct its possessor to madness, or make him the originator of some new thought or new thing in the world” (Responsibility in Mental Disease 56). If divine madness had such respectable authority, why has the Pall Mall Gazette writer used “madness” as a term of opprobrium?

Poetic madness had already been the subject of critical anxiety since it might be seen as somehow privileging the poet’s own troubled mental state. In his 1831 article in the Monthly

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<sup>12</sup> In the Phaedrus Plato defines four kinds of madness: Prophetic madness, whose patron god is Apollo; teletic or ritual madness whose patron is Dionysus; poetic madness inspired by the muses; erotic madness inspired by Aphrodite and Eros (Dodds, 64). The kinds of madness that particularly concern the Pythia are prophetic madness, since she “moans from within the cave mixing together truth with the arcane.” Sappho’s association with the maenad brings the Dionysiac; her own verse displays erotic madness and the turning his libido into verse induces poetic madness.

Repository William Johnson Fox, in spite of his assertion of the need for “enthumia”:  
“whenever [there is] enthusiasm, there is lyric poetry” (531), worried that Tennyson “entered into “the most strange and wayward idiosyncrasies of other men” (532). This was an uncomfortable area and early Victorian poets had been anxious to distance themselves from the madness of their protagonists. Sydney Dobell had his hero Balder kill his wife out of fear for her madness, in order to distance both his protagonist and himself from its contamination; Browning had written of madness in his dramatic monologues, but carefully distanced himself by prefacing them with the words “mad cells”. Why? Now the reason why this excessive introspection, this incipient madness was particularly worrying was because it smacked of an erosion of masculinity; it was “unmanly”. Tennyson had foregrounded madness in “Maud,” but the hero’s final resolve to go forth and fight, provided proof of a rejection of effeminizing madness. Arnold in his “Preface to First Edition of Poems” (1853) repudiated the worrying unmanly subjectivity of Empedocles by excluding the poem from his second edition, and declaring *action* as a necessary part of verse and castigating poetry where “a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope or resistance. In such situations there is inevitably something morbid in the description of them, something monotonous” (656).

The tell-tale word is “morbid”. In the National Review W.C. Roscoe employs the same word to criticise “Maud”, and interestingly he uses a Pythic connection: Tennyson is “a mere morbid mouthpiece” (Armstrong Victorian Scrutinies 42).<sup>13</sup> The word has connotations not only of abnormality, but of “softness”, as in the Italian adjective “morbida”, it came to indicate an abnormality that took the form of *feminising* softness reminiscent of that shown in contemporary art, where depictions of languorous women suggested masturbatory activities – which, of course, were well known to lead to madness.<sup>14</sup> Sanity and masculinity were synonymous, and by implication, femininity and madness. Yet in Poems and Ballads: 1 the poet’s “rabida ora” (mad

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<sup>13</sup> Ruskin uses the word in his discussion of the pathetic fallacy: quoting from Coleridge’s “Christabel” when he claims “he has a morbid, that is to say, a so far false idea about the leaf; he fancies a life in it, and will, which there are not” (Bristow Poetics and Persona 88).

<sup>14</sup> Dijkstra comments: “...with the widespread rediscovery of feminine sexuality in the 1870s, and especially with the identification of female masturbation as an urgent problem, a new strangely voyeuristic form of masculine self-reassurance and non-involvement in woman’s sexuality found expression in the visual arts” (69).

utterance) associate themselves not with the respectable “enthumia” of the male poet, but the very female madness that male poets had been anxious to distance themselves from. And this female madness was not simply a harmless sexual degeneracy, but a dangerous “hysteria” arising etymologically from the Greek word for womb.<sup>15</sup> In The Darkened Room Alex Owen comments: “A diagnosis of hysteria could represent moral degeneracy, rampant sexuality, questionable religious excess or a mixture of all three” (148). Sussman cites Millais’ Disentombment of Queen Matilda (1849) in which he describes the nuns’ reactions “as ranging from mild agitation, to fear to fainting, to the fusion of spiritual and sexual ecstasy, reminiscent of the conventional figure of St Theresa shown by the elevated nun at the left-centre of the composition” (136-7).<sup>16</sup> Yet it is in these very terms that Swinburne describes Cassandra / Sappho in On The Cliffs: “Love’s priestess errant on dark ways diverse” and again, as “Song’s priestess mad with joy and pain of love, / Love’s priestess, mad with pain and joy of song.” Swinburne places female hysteria at the very heart of lyric, the two are inextricably involved.<sup>17</sup> And he has good authority for so doing, Longinus discussing fragment 32 cites Sappho’s thwarted eros and her resultant hysteric state as the supreme example of excellence in lyric: “she...is irrational and sane, is afraid and nearly dead, so that we observe in her not one single emotion but a whole concourse of emotions.” Sappho is an exemplum of how lyric springs up from repressed female sexuality as it escapes from the womb, and it is this mimicking of Sappho, this privileging of the libido’s madness in terms of the feminine that makes Poems and Balads: 1 so shocking.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Gilbert and Gubar usefully list contemporary scholarly work on the madwoman (xxxii –xxxiii).

<sup>16</sup> Whether or not Swinburne was familiar with this picture, he was drawn to the conflation of religious ecstasy and repressed sexuality: in reply to Turgenev’s question he expressed a desire “to ravish Saint Genevieve during her most ardent ecstasy of prayer –but in addition with her secret consent” (Henderson 148). Interestingly, Bowra (for reasons that are not entirely clear to me) compares Sappho to St. Teresa (196).

<sup>17</sup> Armstrong commenting on the similarities between Hopkins and Swinburne writes: “... what brings both poets into a fully dialectical relation with one another is a quality that can only be termed *hysteria* in language” (Victorian Poetry 403). She argues that the difference between their approaches is, that Swinburne’s is one of bravura and Hopkins of unease.

<sup>18</sup> We can see how closely the symptoms of hysteria echo Sappho’s own state described in Fragment 32. “Although the symptoms of hysteria were varied, they included blindness, selective anaesthesia, inability to speak, trance states, swooning and physical contortions.” (Surrealism and Contemporary Art: Subversive Spaces 23).

The dominance of a Sapphic muse so imbued with a history of hysteria, forefronts a brooding female interiority which may erupt into violence at any moment: Faustine may be bidden “to lean back and get some minutes’ peace”, i.e. indulge in masturbatory languor, but this is a woman who is addicted to “the games men played with death”; serpents surround her and she will mete out sex or poison indiscriminately; in “Aholibah” the poet comments: “Yea for pure lust her body was.” And he goes on to describe “her blood’s violence”, and her fatal adulteries. Phaedra has “a pulse [that] is heavy”, her “whole face beats,” she is “burnt to the bone with love.” This madness will bring about the death of Hippolytus. Linda Dowling points to the horror inspired by the bare-breasted Mlle. Aubry playing the part of Liberty in opera, and she describes how such iconography continued to excite unease in the public consciousness (20-21). We see such a woman in “Laus Veneris” when the languorous goddess of the first stanza reveals herself as a force of destruction, “Yea, all she slayeth.” However, it is this repressed female energy, this destructive simmering madness that erupts and *becomes* lyric. In “The Masque of Queen Bersabe”, Sappho comments: “My blood was the hot wan wine of love, / And my song’s sound the sound thereof. / The sound of the delight of it.” In “Anactoria” Sappho asserts “Thy body is the song”, yet this song is reached through a sadistic violence paramount to madness in the course of which she has effeminized the poet. This sexualised female madness becomes the stuff of lyric:

Thine eyes with bloodlike tears and grievous light  
Strike pang from pang as note is struck from note,  
Catch the sob’s middle music in thy throat,  
Take thy limbs living, and new-mould with these  
A lyre of many faultless agonies.

Poems and Ballads:1 associates the genre of lyric with female madness, the madness of the sibyl with her “rabida ora”(“mad utterance”), the hysteria of Sappho tormented by eros, the wildness of Cassandra, the Bacchic fury of the maenad, and the maddened cries of the Pythia. And yet

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this feminine madness is seen to emanate from the *male* poet, from *his* ego. It asserts a totally opposed dialectic from that of Carlyle. Now everything that Carlyle feared as aberrant in male energy, described by Sussman as “the eruption of the interior fluid energy with the consequent dissolution of psychic control” (21), and from which he had distanced the male poet and displaced on to the female, is now proclaimed as belonging to the male poet, to *his* psyche, and indispensable to verse. Male creativity results, not from a rigorous controlling of this force, but from a celebration of its escape. It is a wonderful turning on its head of current literary opinion:

A literary education is the work of a long time; and women who write the best almost always display their want of its discipline sooner or later. Literary genius means among other things the power of bringing sympathy and passion under the stern control of artistic law. Without this self control passion itself becomes weak or luxuriant; and sympathy generates into weakness. There is no other training that gives it except the laborious study and appreciation of classical models and this training is almost out of the reach of women. (“Literary Women” in Literary Review 1864; quoted by Hilary Fraser in Gender and the Victorian Periodical 33)

Poems and Ballads:1 valorises the very “feminine” lack of control that the writer lauds, and the precedent for doing this comes from the very source that the writer recommends, the Classical, and who could be a better role model than Sappho?

### **“Nec mortale sonans”: the sublime**

Unconscious utterance and female madness are necessary states for reaching the sublime: when the Sibyl, Pythia or Cassandra struggle with Apollo, they turn the sexual into a divine message; when the Sapphic muse, the libido struggles with Swinburne’s super ego, she turns the libido into verse, she aims for a sublime, “a beautiful moment”. But what exactly *is* the Sublime arrived at by Swinburne and his Sapphic muse? Why will it differ from contemporary



assumptions concerning the sublime? How will it respond to “this divine mystery” of Carlyle? (“The Hero as Poet” 64).

To tease out from his critical remarks what the sublime meant to Swinburne is far from easy; what, for example, does he mean when he asserts in his article on Christopher Marlowe: “sublimity is the test of the imagination as distinguished from invention or fancy”( SAC 278)? As Thomas E. Connolly comments: “...what is lacking is the deliberate analytical approach to a formal theory of poetry” (131). Yet, if we are to understand the sort of sublime that would emerge in Poems and Ballads:1 we must try and decipher what Swinburne meant and envisaged for his own poetics, and relate it to his relationship with Sappho.

Both Connolly and Robert L. Peters identify the two components that they regard as integral to Swinburne’s sublime: Connolly in his chapter “Passion and Imagination” (53-64), and Peters in “Passion and Tact: Creative Tension” (109). Peters is perhaps, the clearer in describing these two elements, and explores “tact”, i.e. technical prowess, and “passion”, the animating or inspiring emotion. Indeed we can see that when Swinburne claims of Shelley and Coleridge: “Wind and fire, the cadence of thunder and the clamours of the sea, gave to them no less of sensual pleasure than of spiritual sustenance” (CW 15: 126-7), he describes passion; and when he praises Rossetti’s paintings for “symbolic power derived from vivid detail passionately rendered”, he describes tact and passion. These two aspects relate neatly to the qualities that inscribe Sappho’s sublimity: the sublimity of her style equates to “tact”, while the erotics of her verse and legend equate to “passion”. I now look further at these two aspects of Swinburne’s understanding of the sublime and relate them to Sappho.

In describing Keats’ sublime, Swinburne comments on “that exquisite and epicurean subtlety in expression of sensations....” (CW 14: 241), thus echoing the attention given to tact by Sappho, discussed by Longinus. Conversely, in criticising Chapman he castigates him for lacking these credentials: “grammar, metre, sense, sound, coherence and relevancy are hurled together ...” (Hyder SAC: 141). He follows the assertion of Alexander Smith in “The Philosophy of Poetry”: “It [poetry] is essentially the expression of emotion, but the expression of emotion takes place

by *measured language*” (in Bristow 51); his stance is decidedly not Shelley’s since he (Shelley) seems to assert in his Defence of Poetry that unconscious utterance should be left alone: “A man cannot say ‘I will compose poetry.’ It is an error to assert that the finest passages of poetry are produced by labour and study” (Abrams 192). Swinburne, like Sappho, laboured to achieve the correct metrical effects, however, like Keats, he took care that such labouring should not be apparent, there should be no “evident marks of the passage of the pumice stone” (CW 14:241). In this we can see an echoing of the expertise of the Pythia who was trained to express her inspired utterance in the form of polished, but apparently effortless hexameters. The Sibyl’s utterances too, were inscribed on leaves and carefully arranged in order.<sup>19</sup> And if we think back over the struggle of poet and muse discussed in the last chapter, we remember that the coercion of the muse or the struggle of the libido, its *passion*, was to due to an anxiety to produce a result as equally satisfactory as a sexual sublime, and like Pasiphae, the muse chose “a cunning craftsman”, the thinking ego who might express the madness of the passion; the passion itself is blind and violent, but it is turned by the poet’s skill into exquisite utterance. For Swinburne the two, passion and tact are not separate entities but both are interconnected in the sublime. In his critique, entitled “Mathew Arnold’s New Poems” Swinburne writes:

The technical beauty of his work is one with the spiritual; a poet’s art above all others cannot succeed in this and fail in that. Success or achievement of an exalted kind on the spiritual side ensures and enforces a like executive achievement of success; if the handiwork be flawed there must have been some distortion or defect of spirit....” (Hyder SAC 74).

This assertion echoes Longinus’ description of Sappho’s fragment 1 in which he describes, what is in effect, a combination of tact and passion: “All this, of course, happens to people in love; but, as I said, it is her selection of the most important details and her combination of them into a

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<sup>19</sup>

quaecumque in foliis descripsit carmina virgo  
digerit in numerum (Aeneid 3: 445- 452)

“Whatever verses the girl writes down on the leaves, she arranges in order.”

single whole that have produced the excellence of the poem.” It is to this Sapphic equilibrium of tact and passion that is necessary to the reaching out towards sublimity that Swinburne refers when he speaks of “inner” and “outer” music, which together produce harmony. Shelley, whom as we have seen, Swinburne associates with Sappho, exemplifies this combination, as he explains in his discussion of “Episychidion”:

... the depth and exaltation of its dominant idea, by the rapture of the music and the glory of the colour which clothe with sound and splendour the subtle and luminous body of its thought, by the harmony of its most passionate notes and the humanity of its most godlike raptures, it holds a foremost place in the works of that poet.  
(CW15:396)

We might compare this with the birdsong of the Sapphic nightingale where tact and passion combine together: their harmony produces “song and the secrets of it and their might” (“On The Cliffs”). Sappho combines the two sorts of Sublimity and represents a perfect tension between tact and passion, between inner and outer music, because in her, each is in equilibrium with the other. In his critique of Rossetti’s translation of Fragment 32a, Swinburne vividly describes how he sees this combination enacting the Sapphic sublime, “that dignity of divinity”:

...no man can give again in full that ineffable glory and grace as of present godhead, that subtle breath and bloom of very heaven itself, that dignity of divinity which informs the most passionate and piteous notes of the unapproachable poetess with such grandeur as would seem impossible to such passion. Here [in Rossetti’s translation] is a delicious and living music, but here is not – what can nowhere be – the echo of that unimaginable song, with its pauses and redoubled notes and returns and falls of sound, as of honey dropping from heaven – as of tears and fire and seed of life – which though but run over and repeated in thought pervades the spirit with “a sweet possessive pang” (CW 15: 33).

Thus he describes the sublimity of “the present godhead”: it is defined by “tact” in its “delicious and living music” and “unimaginable song, with its pauses and redoubled notes and returns and falls of sound”; and it expresses its “passion”. This, then, is what Swinburne will try to replicate in his own work in Poems and Ballads: 1, under the force of Sapphic possession.<sup>20</sup>

But what are we to understand by “the most passionate and piteous notes”? What is this passion that emanates from the “pectus anhelum”, “the heaving breast”? In his eulogy of the Sapphic sublime (above) Swinburne attempts to describe what it is he means by “passion”, and in doing so, describes, perhaps inadvertently, his own struggle with the Sapphic muse who has inflicted “the sweet possessive pang” on him: as a sentient male he has actually suffered pangs at the hands of the whip of that proto- Sapphic dominatrix Gordon, and later at Eton, from the Sapphic Metre Mistress herself; and as a poet, he has suffered violent pangs through necrophilia, castration and even “death” at the hands of the Sapphic muse, who has violently turned the libido in her attempt to achieve an alternative sublime. Swinburne sees pangs as necessary to verse: “Some, like Dante, condense the whole agony of life into one exquisite and bitter drop of distilled pain. Others like Shakespeare, translate it *pang by pang* into a complete cadence and symphony of suffering” (Lang 13: 215; emphasis added). For Swinburne such pangs come from Sappho; pangs strike throughout Poems and Ballads: 1: in “Anactoria” the muse will “Strike *pang from pang* as note is struck from note / .....With perfect pangs convulse thy perfect mouth.” In “Dolores” the beloved dominatrix is begged to provide “a dream of impossible *pangs*.” These pangs belong to the struggle of poet and muse and it is through them that the Sapphic sublime will be reached.

It is a sublime that associates itself with the original Greek *παθος*, suffering, and it speaks of something that Swinburne could, in his critical work, only hint at, with the use of such terms as “sensuous fluctuation of the soul” (CW 15:147).<sup>21</sup> The Concise Oxford English Dictionary

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<sup>20</sup> For Swinburne’s own skill with “tact” see Buckler (229).

<sup>21</sup> Connolly comments: “Swinburnean terms *sublimity* and *spiritual instinct* are used whenever he speaks of the perfect or “real” imagination” (62). But what is this “real imagination” if not a coding for the emergent libido?

defines “pang” as “a sudden sharp pain or painful emotion”, and yet this definition does not wholly convey the sense: “pangs” suggest an after-effect of some earlier transgression, as when we speak of “pangs” of remorse or of conscience, we acknowledge that some aberrance has occurred; pangs speak of shuddering and fracturing, as in the after-effects of physical pain. And indeed, such pangs speak of Sappho through her own association with fracture, her aberrance and her association with the darkness of myth and the psyche (as discussed in Chapter 3). In inflicting these pangs the muse has forced upon the verse her own painful constructs.<sup>22</sup> It is from these that the Sublime will emerge; but what sort of sublime will they forge as they hammer at the poetic anvil? To explore this further I return to the treatment of the sibyl at the hands of Apollo.

Earlier we saw how the sibyl and the poet were subject to fracture, the sibyl by the breaking effect of Apollo’s goad, and the poet at the hands of his dominatrical Sapphic muse; and we saw how the libido broke out of control and battered at the ego in the form of rippling and resonating pangs which “remugunt” throughout the volume as the sibyl’s moans throughout the antrum and break the silence. This fracture then will form an integral part of the Sublime. What then, does this mean in terms of Swinburne’s poetics?

The force of pangs as they devolve from Sappho’s power to “strike and sting”, makes fracture integral to verse, and it is by their means that the only possible means of glimpsing the Sublime is given. It can only be glimpsed, it cannot be realized: if the poet or artist were to reveal the Sublime in full, the reader like Semele in her viewing of Zeus, would be destroyed by its power. Such an alternative route to the sublime is contemplated in “The Orchard” when the lover cries: “Slay me ere day can slay desire again... / Yea, with thy sweet lips, with thy sweet sword; yea / Take life and all, for I will die, I say.” However, the speaker accepts that realistically the

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Again, when Swinburne claims, “Sublimity is the test of the imagination as distinguished from invention or fancy”, the test surely refers to the struggle of the poet at the hands of the muse, of libido and ego?

<sup>22</sup> In line 77 of the Aeneid (see above), the participle “patiens” is used of the sibyl: “At Phoebi nondum patiens”, she does not yet suffer at the hands of Apollo, but will eventually be brought under his control as “ille fatigat / os rabidum, fera cora domans.” “He exhausts her, taming her violent spirit” (80).

sublime cannot be reached: “Nay, I will sleep then only...” The poet must be content to know and to accept the knowledge that: “ideal beauty lies beyond the most beautiful forms, and ideal perfection beyond the most perfect words that art can imbue with life or inflame with colour; an excellence that expression can never realise that possession can never destroy (CW 13:241).<sup>23</sup> And indeed the presence of the (Sapphic) hermaphrodite in the volume expresses a striving towards this impossible sublime.

However, the presence of the Sapphic muse allows the reader to glimpse the sublime through fracture, just as Swinburne himself had glimpsed the sublime partially in his reading of Sappho and through his dwelling on flagellation, and indeed the two associated together (as discussed in Chapter 2). Such viewing of verse through fracture had been looked upon with disfavour by Victorian critics. In his “Essay on Shelley” Browning uneasily describes the poet’s work as “a sublime fragmentary essay” (580), giving one the impression that the verse suffered from its fracture. In his essay “Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties” Mill castigates Shelley because “his most ambitious compositions too often resemble the scattered fragments of a mirror,” and he requires “coherency and consistency” (42); but Swinburne who so much admired Shelley and his links to Sappho, will valorise such an approach. It will be through such shattered fragments that Poems and Ballads: 1 will refract the Sublime.

The reader too, will be compelled to accept this fractured viewing: John Morley, for example, in his article for the Saturday Review, after pages of castigation in which he accuses Swinburne of “grovelling down among the nameless shameless abominations which inspire him with such frenzied delights” is forced to acknowledge that “there is a perfect delicacy and beauty in four lines of the hendecasyllabics (23, 28). He then proceeds to quote as an example lines which contain images of fracture: “low light”; “windy reaches”, “flowers...blown”; “a lily dropt.”

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<sup>23</sup> Both Tennyson and Browning had suggested the impossibility of reaching the sublime: Tennyson’s Ulysses sees “that untravelled world, whose margin fades/ For ever and for ever when I move.” Browning’s Andrea del Sarto famously claims: “...a man’s reach should exceed his grasp or what’s a heaven for?”

The poem offers tantalising glimpses of the Sublime which must be read and recollected in fragments: “the month of the long decline of roses”; “the silent traveller”; “the noise of waters”; “noiseless angels”; “mysterious reaches”; “sweet sad straits”; “fluttering winds”; “dead flowers”; “an ember among fallen ashes”; “bitter light of hoarfrost”; “pale white chaplets”; “the flower of foam”; “the pastureless fields”; “weeping winter”; “iron blossoms of frost”; “sonorous fruitless furrows.” The poem and its images (many of which directly relate to Sappho, as we saw in Chapter 3), can finally only be viewed, like the sea, as a “soft subsiding channel” whose images of the sublime glimmer, subside and disappear. As we gather up these fragments, try to fit them together, compare and contrast them, our view of the sublime is glimpsed, enhanced, and finally shattered. The reader must not attempt to view the verse as a whole, but read it as a collection of fragments. The poem’s reference to “fluttered foliage, / Shaken fitfully, full of sound and shadow” (lines 10-11) foreshadows Swinburne’s use of “blown leaves” in “Dedication” to describe the disparate and scattered nature of his verse in the volume. Speaking of “my verses, the first-fruits of me”, he adds: “Let the wind take the green and the grey leaf.” The verses are offered as “lost leaves that the shore-wind may squander.” This reminds us of the sibyl’s prophecies which were left to the mercy of the winds, so that those who had come for explicit written advice “departed unsatisfied and loathed the sibyl’s seat”.<sup>24</sup> The “fluttered foliage” aims for the same sublime effect that Sappho describes in Fragment 47: “Love shook

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<sup>24</sup> quaecumque in foliis descripsit carmina virgo  
digerit in numerum atque antro seclusa relinquit:  
illa manent immota locis neque ab ordine cedunt.  
verum eadem, verso tenuis cum cardine ventus  
impulit et teneras turbavit ianua frondes,  
numquam deinde cavo volitantia prendere saxo  
nec revocare situs aut iungere carmina curat;  
inconsulti abeunt sedemque odere sibyllae ( Aeneid 3: 445- 452)

“Whatever verses the girl writes down on the leaves, she arranges in order and abandons them confined within the cave; they remain unmoving in their places and do not stir from their appointed position, but whenever a light breeze blows, the door hinges come open, and [the draught from] the door disturbs the delicate leaves, then she never takes the trouble to catch them as they flutter about the cave, nor to recall their places and put the verses back together; they [those who had sought advice] go away uninformed and hate the place of the Sibyl.”

Aeneas is apprehensive of this outcome: “foliis tantum ne carmina manda, / ne turbata volent rapidis ludibris ventis.”(Aeneid 6: 74-5).“But do not commit your verses to the leaves in case disturbed they fly about as a sport to the rushing winds.”

my heart like a wind falling on oaks on a mountain.”<sup>25</sup> Swinburne presents the volume as a series of sublime broken fragments, such as those he describes in Blake as “scattered jewels of sound without a thread, tortuous network of harmonies without a clue” (Hyder SAC 119). Poems and Ballads:1 is a replica of “Poetae Graeci” in which Swinburne first glimpsed Sappho’s own sublime in the form of a collection of Sapphic fragments. Such fragments whether belonging to Sappho or to Swinburne, deny a poetic intention, they tease the reader; they threaten the comforting assumption of plenitude and they deny the supremacy of the whole.

In his discussion of the poetics of Eneas Sweetland Dallas, Swinburne’s contemporary, Jerome Buckley concludes: “Art then, succeeded in suggesting a wholeness, a harmony, a consistency” (144). It was this challenge to the whole that Thomas Spencer Baynes writing in the Edinburgh Review, finds so threatening: he castigates Swinburne and asserts “The true and perfect lyric springs from an internal principle of life into the exquisite proportions and completeness of a finely organised and beautiful whole” (86). Yet the critic is presented with a problem since Swinburne’s poems *do* manage to fall into the category of “true and perfect lyric”, without the required completeness, just as Sappho’s do; in fact, they achieve it through their very brokenness; they do not so much “spring from an internal principle of life”, as from the fracturing of the Sublime.

In the poem “Dedication”, Swinburne describes his verse through an analogy of birds - a fitting analogy which refers to the avian personae of Sappho and to his own; the birds’ beating wings may evoke the beating of the poems’ rhythms or the notion of flagellation; they can also be viewed through the eyes of soothsayers as signifiers of a dimly described other. The poems are “untameable”, they cannot be brought into a recognizable state of wholeness, since such a state is dissipated by the ruffling of the birds’ wings; in this ruffling and quivering we can glimpse

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<sup>25</sup> Swinburne himself comments on the pointlessness of trying to “thread” the fragments together:

There are photographs from life in the book; and there are sketches from the imagination. Some which keen-sighted criticism has dismissed with a smile as ideal or imaginary were as real and actual as they well could be: others which have been taken for obvious transcripts from memory were utterly fantastic or dramatic. (Hyder SR 92)



forgotten sublimities, but these too fracture “in the stream of the storm”, and dissolve into obscurity. And yet Swinburne would seem to castigate obscurity: “Obscurity is the natural product of turbid forces and confused ideas; of a feeble and clouded or of a vigorous but unfixed and chaotic intellect”. However, when he goes on to cite Fulke Greville as such a one, we can see what it is that makes his own apparent obscurity different: Greville is “overcharged with overflowing thoughts, is *not sufficiently possessed* by any *one leading idea* or attracted towards any *one central point* to see with decision the proper end and use with resolution the proper instruments of his design” (Hyder SAC 156; emphasis added). Swinburne’s own Sapphic possession, his “one leading idea”, his “one central point”, has ensured the marriage of passion and tact that will bring about verse that is sublime, but whose meaning can only be opaque. As he says of Blake: “Only by innate and irrational perception” can we apprehend and enjoy the supreme works of verse and colour” (CW 16:85). Sappho too is supreme, and because of her fracture and lability, she too, can only be approached at “the broken altar of her song” (Lang 4:124).

It is such broken and breaking song that Swinburne emulates in “Sapphics” when he echoes her with “Songs that move the heart of the shaken heaven, / Songs that break the heart of the earth with pity.” In his essay on Victor Hugo he uses virtually the same words to describe the poet’s task in translating the effect: “Every master of pathos has a key of his own to unlock the source of tears, or of that passionate and piteous pleasure which lies above and under the region of tears” (CW 13: 215).<sup>26</sup> However, the poet’s key must be reforged by the readers in order to glimpse the sublime for themselves. The voice of the Sibyl “re-echoes from the cave”, so too, it is through echoes of sound, that Sappho’s own essence must be heard, and the sound is the outcome of the sexual struggle of Sibyl with Apollo, of id and ego; of poet and muse; and in the echoing is the sound of Sappho and the sound of desire which communicates itself to the listener: as Reynolds comments on the reverberating power of Sappho:

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<sup>26</sup> Ruskin endorses the poet’s obscurity with the same analogy: the truth of a work was often “withheld on purpose and close locked that you may not get to it till you have forged the key of it in a furnace of your own heating” (19: 308).

The original desire – as something bodily felt by the subject – may have disappeared. But the shadow of desire as something re-enacted through the skill of the poet – is communicated to the object: the listener, the beloved, the audience, the reader of the poem. Me.You. Us. (1)

The fracturing of Swinburne's verse, written under the force of Sappho, will allow glimpses of the Sublime, "the shadow of desire", to be re-enacted in the reader's own psyche, whether or not it is wished for.

Such a valorisation of fracture has far-reaching implications. Page du Bois, discussing the significance of the brokenness of the Sapphic fragment comments, "perhaps the dream of a restored wholeness, perfection, completeness is caught up in the patriarchal, metaphysical condition of absolute union with God, the father" (53). The enforced viewing of the sublime through the medium of Sapphic fracture deliberately threatened not only the lyric form, but offered a threat to patriarchy itself, as we shall see in the following chapter.

While fracture will allow glimpses of the sublime, this will be no conventional sublime; the Sibyl's words are described by Virgil as "ambages", defined by Lewis as "a riddle, enigma, dark saying" (Elementary Latin Dictionary). This is a sublime that is perforce dark and aberrant. When John Morley accuses Swinburne of "grovelling down among the nameless shameless abominations which inspire him with such frenzied delights" (CH 23), he recognizes the aberrant in the sublime, but is unwilling to admit its necessary presence; but the sublime's association with aberrance is self-evident, since it represents the other that cannot be associated with states of normality. As we have seen in the last chapter, the making of the sublime was achieved by the poet through abnormal states such as madness, dream and necrophilia, and when the poet speaks with "rabida ora", it is with such aberrance that he is imbued. In Poems and Ballads: 1 Swinburne will demonstrate the inextricable entanglement of verse and aberrance as it seeks to express the sublime.

Ruskin notes the interconnection between the aberrant and the sublime in “Faustine” since, while the verse makes him “all hot like pies with devil’s fingers in them”, at the same time, he has to affirm its sublimity: “How beautiful, how divinely beautiful”(quoted in Henderson 114). However much Ruskin is dazzled by the sublime, he acknowledges the necessary aberrance of the creative artist: “There is assuredly something wrong with you awful in proportion to the great power it affects... It seems to be the peculiar judgment-curse of modern days that all their greatest men shall be plague-struck” (Lang 1:182).

Ruskin sees that aberrance must be an essential ingredient, and that Swinburne’s is deeper, more innate than a mere impishness of the kind Buchanan would like to dismiss him with, when he describes the poet as “a little mad boy letting off squibs” (“The Fleshly School” 36); there is a deep aberrance at the very core of verse, it is this, in fact, which Walter Bagehot dimly descries in what he terms “the grotesque”: “it deals, .... not with normal types but with abnormal specimens; to use the language of old philosophy, not with what nature is striving to be, but what, by some lapse she has happened to become” (640). Bagehot here cites Browning, but while Browning and Tennyson may be subject to suspicion, their forays into the perverse are mild in comparison with Swinburne’s. Why is this? “Porphyria’s Lover” is as unsavoury in its way as “The Leper”, both deal with necrophilia, but there is a difference: the lover of Porphyria reports the incident as a very recent one – we suppose that he will not sit with his dead lover after the night in question and we assume there will be some kind of closure to the incident, whereas in “The Leper” the lover has already sat there for months and continues to savour the decomposing body; Browning’s lover relishes golden hair that must be, in fact, still alive and even growing, Swinburne’s lover’s pleasure derives, as we have seen, from the putrid: “... her hair, half grey, half ruined gold / Thrills me and burns me in kissing it.” It is this foregrounding of the putrid in the Sublime, this replication of the necrophilia Swinburne has enjoyed with his muse, that makes this sublime so shocking. Swinburne himself admits this necessary presence in the verse of Hugo who “achieves the Sublime through the handling of the grotesque: he transforms the image of a mutilated child’s face into a figure of heroic beauty.” Hugo’s mastery is here “divine” (CW 13: 217).

In Poems and Ballads:1 the presence of “the dead white limbs of the Lesbian Sappho adrift” sets a new sort of Sublime that belongs to the withered body of the Sibyl as she hangs in a bottle waiting to die.<sup>27</sup> It reflects the necrophiliac worship of Sappho that the muse has insisted on. In “The Masque of Queen Bersabe” the presence of the dead body of Sappho proffers a triumphant sublime that is composed of the putrid: “The intolerable infinite desire / Made my face pale like faded fire / When the ashen pyre falls through with heat.” It is the sublime, as we saw in the last chapter, associated with Baudelaire’s “Une Charogne”. When Swinburne writes of poems “made on heroic bones”, he asks the question: “can these bones live?” to which he supplies the reply: “If he is a poet indeed, these will at once be clothed with instant flesh and re-inspired with immediate breath” (Hyder SAC 150). However he is telling only half the truth, since, as we saw in the previous chapter, it is the rotting flesh and the broken bones from which he draws his inspiration.

When the enraged Buchanan speaks of “the leg disease” in “The Fleshly School of Poetry”, he subliminally recognises that the legs are dead legs, or rapidly becoming so; the disease is not simply the very public presence of sex since “the pure rose of English maidenhood still blows as brightly as ever”, but the putrid in the leg is “spreading daily like all cancerous diseases, foul in itself and creating foulness (7). The sublime arrived at in Poems and Ballads: 1 valorises Bagehot’s grotesque: it depends on “abnormal specimens”, it eulogises “not what nature is striving to be, but what, by some lapse she has happened to become” (640). If seekers after truth come to the oracle, or readers to Poems and Ballads: 1, they must confront the skeletal Sibyl, the aged Pythia; they must learn to acknowledge the putrid as a necessary part of the sublime. In his defense of “Hermaphroditus” Swinburne transfers the putrid from himself on to the reader: “loathsome and abominable and full of unspeakable foulness must be that man’s mind who could here discern evil” (Notes; Hyder SR 28). Aberrance, he implies, is caught like an infection

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<sup>27</sup> The Pythia was chosen in middle age, i.e for the Greeks she was an old woman. For an imaginative interpretation of the dead / live Pythia, see Golding:

The first lady [the Pythia] died, though according to Ionides it was difficult to tell. She had not lain in a bed for years but always sat upright on her chair, her bright unseeing eyes open, her skeleton hands folded in her lap. At the end she neither ate nor drank and one day an attendant brushed against her and she fell over sideways and – I am assured- more or less fell apart. (70)

from the verse, the Philistine will only be conscious of the putrescence, the sublime will escape him.

**“Adflata est numine quando”: the poet as priest/ess**

I have discussed Sappho’s “pangs” and their role in the sublime as a means of insisting on fracture and aberrance. I now turn to the influence of Sappho’s Greekness and the darkness of myth, to explore the role of the poet in his mediation of the sublime.

If the poet has revealed the sublime, and like the Sibyl, has sung out his “awe- inspiring mysteries”, he accords with Emerson’s “sayer, the namer and [one who] represents beauty”(“The Poet” 59), even if he has shown this beauty to be intimately connected with the aberrant, and the Dionysian; he would seem to agree with Carlyle whose poet is “a man sent hither to make it [ “the divine mystery”] more impressively known to us. That is always his message; he is to reveal that to us – that sacred mystery which he more than others lives ever present with” ( “The Hero as Poet” 66). Is the poet of Poems and Ballads: 1 something more than a revealer, does his association with the Sibyl, the Pythia and Cassandra as conduits of the divine source of song, make him into a prophet, allow him to be defined as a *vates*? Where did Swinburne as Sapphic mouthpiece, stand in relation to contemporary thinking?

He is not a “*vates*”in the sense that Barrett-Browning would have the poet in “Aurora Leigh”, one of “the only teachers who instruct mankind” (1.864), since his unconscious utterance precludes him from the didactic. But is he in any sense a prophet? In “The Hero as Poet” Carlyle draws a distinction between “The *vates* Prophet [who] has seized that sacred mystery rather on the moral side, as Good and Evil, Duty and Prohibition “and the *vates* poet “on what the Germans call the aesthetic side, as Beautiful and the like”(66). Now it is obvious that the Sapphic presence has precluded Swinburne from being the “*vates* prophet” who distinguishes between “Good and Evil, Duty and Prohibition”. His struggles are not, as Browning describes Shelley’s those “of a boy towards distant truth and love...before the full moral sunrise could shine out on him” (“Essay on Shelley” 576). His is not a struggle towards “a moral sunrise”, but

one between ego and id, a struggle for the possession of the poet by a dead(ly) muse who emanates from the Ancient World, and who associates herself with no form of conventional morality, and particularly not with contemporary conventional religious practice. The poet refutes the bogus religious practices associated with conventional morality. In “Hymn to Proserpine” the signifiers of Christianity are pallid and lifeless, as a result of the triumph of “the pale Gallilean” “the world has grown grey”; the “new gods” have “lips that live blood faints in”, they proselytize through “the leavings of racks and rods”. In these leavings there can be nothing sacred: “I kneel not, neither adore you.” There will be no material here for prophecy. However, Swinburne claims that two of his favourite poets, Blake and Hugo belong to the “prophetic or evangelical order” (CW 13: 341). What does he mean?

In discussing Blake’s Book of Thels Swinburne uses the analogy of the tripod, and comments, “The poem is a prophecy as literally as any other of Blake’s.”<sup>28</sup> He goes on to explain what he means by the word “prophecy”: it is “an inspired exposition of material things; for none of course pretend to be prophecies in the inaccurate and vulgar sense of prediction” (CW16: 245). Connolly comments: “‘The exposition of material things’ was simply Blake’s communication to others of the spiritual significance of the divine cause and meaning of all material things of the universe” (35). However, as we have seen, Nature is for Swinburne an aberrant force, and in discussing the poem Swinburne shows how Blake’s apparent “sermon on faith hope and charity” is undermined by its conclusion: to “the question lying at the root of life and under the shadow of death, nothing makes answer”(CW16:244). As it has for Blake, Swinburne “divine mystery” emanates from the sacredness of the old gods who are “as cruel as love or life.” It belongs to Dionysus and Apollo and the Mysteries surrounding them, to Aphrodite, to the Mysteries of Cybele, Proserpine and Demeter; these are the gods the poet has met in his encounters with the Greek Muse; it is through *their* sacredness mediated through Sappho’s own divinity, that the

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<sup>28</sup> We have words that are strained well-nigh asunder by strong significance and earnest passion; words that deal greatly with great things that strike deep and hold fast; each inclusive of some fierce apocalypse or suggestive of some obscure evangel. Now the matter in hand is touched with something of an epic style; the narrative and characters lose half their hidden sense, and the reciter passes from the prophetic tripod to the seat of a common singer. ( CW 15: 237)

true divine, the sublime has emerged. The secrets of mythology that so bothered his contemporaries, (see Chapter 1) were now out in the open and celebrated.

By valorising these old gods and their sacred mysteries, the poet is, in a sense, their priest, since he has celebrated his own divine mystery, a Sapphic sublime, very different from Carlyle's. His own priestly service is made explicit when he sings his "Hymn to Proserpine". He valorises the Dionysian sense of the life-force manifested through his female followers:

The laurel, the palms and the paeon, the breast of the nymphs in the brake;  
Breasts more soft than a dove's, that tremble with tenderer breath;  
And all the wings of the Loves, and all the joy before death.  
All the feet of the hours that sound as a single lyre.

In his valorization of Apollo whose "strings that flicker like fire" he anticipates Nietzsche: "And now Apollo comes up to him [the lyric poet] and touches him with the laurel. The Dionysiac music enchantment of the sleeping man now sends out sparks of images, lyric poems...." (29).

Indeed, the poet as Pythia reflects this duality of Apollo and Dionysus: "... at Delphi itself Dionysus was received into partnership, his grave was shown in the inner sanctuary and for three winter months Apollo was believed to hand over the shrine to Dionysus" (Oxford Classical Dictionary). But "the single lyre" also belongs to Sappho, and this admingling of the Apolline and the Dionysian is reconfigured through the presence of Sappho's own particular divinity, and she will valorize *her* sacred female deities: Venus (Aphrodite), as expressed by the erotic force of the libido, Cybele and Demeter whose overwhelming female force has taken the poet's masculinity and Proserpine who personifies the death drive and the Nirvana Principle.

This is the form of the sacred of which the poet is vates-prophet. He is also in a sense "the vates-poet", since he is concerned to explore what Carlyle dismissively terms "the aesthetic side, as Beautiful and the like"; but *his* beauty grows from a fusion of the aberrant with the divine. In his eulogy of the Sapphic Mademoiselle de Maupin, (itself an amalgam of aberrant sexuality and

exquisite writing, of tact and passion), he writes: “This is the golden book of spirit and sense, / *The holy writ* of beauty.....” He continues: “Here is the height of all love’s eminence / Where man may breathe but for a breathing space / And feel his soul burn as an *altar fire*.” (“With a copy of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*”; emphasis added).

Swinburne is an acolyte of Sappho’s aberrant sublime. In “Dolores” the poet is associated with unmentionable sacred rites as he worships “obscure” and “nameless” gods amidst those with “...hair loosened and soiled in mid-orgies / With kisses and wine.” In “At Eleusis” he is associated with Celeus who performed the priestly duties of Demeter and Dionysus, and who will “wax vinewise to a lordly vine, whose grapes / Bleed the red heavy blood of swoln soft wine.” In “Dolores” we saw him associated with Atys in his worship of Cybele, and in the same poem invoking “Cottyto or Venus / Astarte or Ahtaroth”; it is such god/esses he worships, and whose rites he performs, but he performs them at “the broken altar of her [Sappho’s] song” (Lang 4:24). Their sanctity comes to him through her. It is as her priest he takes his stand. In “Lesbos” Baudelaire claims his own position as priest of Sappho:

Car Lesbos entre tous m’a choisi sur la terre  
Pour chanter le secret de ses vierges en fleurs  
Et je fus dès l’enfance admis au noir mystère  
Des rites effrénés mêlés aux sombres pleurs. (270)<sup>29</sup>

It is this role that Swinburne echoes and affirms in “Sapphics”. In the last chapter we saw how the poem acted as a declaration of his submission to Sappho, now as the acolyte of Sappho, he too will sing “au noir mystère”: “Songs that move the heart of the shaken heaven, / Songs that break the heart of the earth with pity”.

In worshipping at Sappho’s altar, albeit a broken one, and performing her rites, he will place himself in the tradition of other Sapphic “priests” who he has met in the course of his

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<sup>29</sup> “For Lesbos ordained me before all others on earth to sing the secret of her nubile vestals; from childhood I was initiate to the dark mystery of unbridled laughter mingled with tears of sorrow....”



necrophiliac worship of Sappho: Landor, Hugo and Shelley, for example, from whom he has taken over the Sapphic mantle. In a sense he is one of Browning's homerides, a member of "a tribe of successors"; but his verse will not be "the straw of last year's harvest", sentiments "diluted from passions" ("Essay on Shelley" 97), since his verse emerges from his own passionate intercourse with Sappho; and by his active participation in her priestly rites he acknowledges his possession by her, and he fulfils the role assigned to Ion by Plato (mentioned above) of a chain of poets "looping the power down from one to another"(536a). Swinburne, then, it would appear, is a species of aberrant priest. That he was so uncomfortably perceived can be seen in the following extract from the Thomas Baynes in the Edinburgh Review:

It [Poems and Ballads:1] may from its very boldness and novelty have a disastrous fascination for excitable but weak unbalanced natures. It is not unlikely indeed, that Mr Swinburne's crude but highly-seasoned hashes of old impieties may even be regarded as a new Evangel. (72)

Indeed, the author does not appreciate the full extent of its "boldness and novelty." Evangels and priests were changing: for example, as Colin Cruise has convincingly shown, Simeon Solomon was to use the priest figure as an ambiguous one, mediating between the holy and unholy and as offering "an alternative to the fixed masculinity of Christ" ("Lovely Devils: Simeon Solomon and PreRaphaelite Masculinity" 207). In his dealings with the divinity of his Sapphic god, Swinburne has been emasculated, and associated with the feminine forms of the Sibyl and the Pythia, so as performer of holy rites he must be viewed, not in association with the male priest, but with the female priestess. Like the acolyte Attis, he will cross gender to attend at the shrine of anti-Virgins, whose worship, like that of Dolores, takes place in a subverted world where, subject to their dominatrical power, he carries out their rites and interprets a terrifying sublime.

In Poems and Ballads:1 holy women have a bad press, they must be worshipped like Dolores "in a twilight where virtues are vices." They are subverted Virgins crouched ready to spring, in their own terrifying horti conclusi. They are aberrant and hysteric, and they threaten the separated spheres of masculinity and the feminine. And yet it is with them that Swinburne the priest/ess

has allied himself to deliver “the golden book of spirit and sense, / The holy writ of beauty.....” In Atalanta Swinburne had shown the devastating effect of such women. Atalanta initially described as “that holy maid”, “clothed in forest holiness”, and in her devotion to Artemis (“Thou, O mine, / O holy, happy goddess”) would appear to be all that is admirable; however, by choosing a life of chastity and abjuring the love of men, she upsets patriarchal society and threatens male virility. Oeneus exclaims, “Why if she ride among us for a man, / Sit thou for her and spin; a man grown girl / Is worth a woman weaponed.” Oeneus is right to view such cross-gendering as threatening: Atalanta’s refusal to remain in her appointed sphere will bring about his own death, that of his brother, and finally that of his nephew Meleager at the hands of his own mother, Althaea. Indeed the holiness of Atalanta becomes subsumed into the murderous mother figure of Althaea, as Swinburne’s own maiden sister Edith had been lost in the presence of the whip-wielding Gordon.

By the 1860s there was a particular anxiety about “holy women”. Recently-established sisterhoods in particular, were viewed with deep suspicion, exciting male fear of pent-up hysteria, as depicted in Millais’ Disentombment of St Matilda (mentioned above), or provoking fantasies of aberrant sexual behaviour.<sup>30</sup> And they offered powerful exemplars of female emancipation, subverting what Sussman terms “the marriage plot” (48). However, it is with such provocative women the poet/ priestess now associates him / herself. At the beginning of the chapter we saw Swinburne engaged in reciting his verse in a trance-like state and in his role as aberrant priestess, he mimics the alarming gender-crossing, life-in-death figure of the medium, to become one of “the repositories, the vessels, the bearers of the spiritual message and channels for divine communication” (Owen 10). Like the medium, the Sapphic priest/ess “will infringe culturally imposed limits” (Owen 11), as she seeks to reveal the sublime.

Swinburne was a priest/ess of an aberrant sublime, bringing to the verse the sinister authority of the priestess, the uncanny powers of the medium. This was a creature unlike the pure reclusive

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<sup>30</sup> Denis Diderot’s 1796 La Religieuse (“The Nun”) with its explicit scenes of sadism and lesbian love is such a book. It is tempting to think that Swinburne with his knowledge of French literature was familiar with it, but whether he had or not, he had read Baudelaire’s “Femmes Damnées” (which may have drawn from it), and been familiar with its description of aberrant religious women “hiding whips under their trailing robes” (“récelant un fouet sous leurs longs vêtements”). Reynolds points out that this is a Sapphic poem (153-4).

figure of Tennyson's "The Poet's Mind", a priest safely apart on his holy ground; this is a poet who has been effeminised by the muse and become a Pythia, has cast off his traditional male priestly duties and becomes the antithesis of Carlyle's Abbot Sampson who signifies manliness, chastity and restraint, and whose heroic example is to be emulated by the man of letters (Sussman 4). The poet is not an abbot or even a priest, he belongs to a terrifying female deity and he operates through states of dream and unconsciousness, performing, like the Pythia, from within her holy space, the fearful feminine cave, the antrum.

When Swinburne mimicked the Pythia's role of priestess and medium and became the agent of sublime revelation, he was not "an unseen musician", the Shelleyan nightingale who "sits in darkness and sings to cheer her own solitude" ("Defence of Poetry" in Shelley's Literary and Philosophical Criticism 129). Nor was he Mill's soliloquizer, "unconscious of a listener" ("Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties", 37), happening to be "overheard by another." It was not enough that the conflict of ego and libido, Keble's "desire to relieve thoughts that could not be controlled", should merely satisfy the poet in the form of cerebral orgasm; it was much further reaching; it was a dramatic eruption of what Byron had described as "larva of the imagination", which would exercise a compulsive fascination over its audience; and as Gosse tells us, Swinburne was only too willing to present it as a Pythic performance:

There were remarkable scenes in the early 'sixties; Swinburne in the studio of some painter-friend, quivering with passion as he recited "Itylus" or "Félise" or "Dolores" to a semi-circle of worshippers, who were thrilled by *the performance* to the inmost fibres of their being. (ACS 133; emphasis added).

The darkened studio was a topos like that of the Sibyl's cave, the fulcrum of feminine power, and the performance celebrated the power of Sappho through the aberrant protagonists of the verse. These were shocking rites, and as we shall see in the next chapter, they would involve the audience, whether they would or no.

## CHAPTER 6

### SAPPHIC KOMOS: “A CARNIVAL OF UGLY SHAPES”?

Your situation should now be compared with that of the Leader of the Muses himself as he appears when Sappho and Pindar in their songs deck him out with golden hair and lyre, and send him drawn by swans to Mount Helicon to dance there with the Muses and Graces. (Fragment 208)

The last chapter concluded with the figure of the poet/priest mimicking the Pythia's role and standing at the altar of Sappho in order to reveal glimpses of the sublime, and in so doing he initiated a piece of religious theatre which mimicked the performance of the Pythia. In this final chapter I shall read Poems and Ballads:1 as primarily a Sapphic performance initiated by the “priestly” rites of Swinburne. I argue that it is through a particular form of “Komos”, revelry attendant on religious festivity, that the Sapphic presence whose possession of Swinburne has been responsible for Poems and Ballads:1, also took a hold on the readers, and that it is this presence which made the volume enticing, threatening, and inescapable for the audience.

Swinburne himself had, in his early days, been much drawn to High Anglicanism with its associated ritual. Praz, tells us, for instance: “At twelve years old Swinburne interpreted as religious fervour a certain ecstasy of adoration which came over him at the moment of receiving the Eucharist ( 242). Indeed, it might well have been its dramatic aspects that most attracted him, and as Praz points out, the teenage play The Unhappy Revenge, (1849) exploits the dramatic possibilities of Christianity through the trope of martyrdom. And while the Christian element was later to be rejected, the theme of martyrdom as the subject of drama persisted, and became translated into the death of the male at the hands of the dominatrix, as can be seen in the early plays Laugh and Lie Down, Rosamond, The Queen Mother, and later in Chastlelard (see Chapter 1, footnotes 57 and 58).

Swinburne's childhood fascination with dramatic performance found a channel of expression in his early interest in the ballad form, i.e. sung performance, and his attempt to utilise it as a means of re-enacting a Sapphic sublime has already been discussed in Chapter 3. But performance dominates the lyrical genre too; in defending "Anactoria", "Dolores" and "Hesperia", Swinburne actually uses the terminology of theatre: "The next act in this lyrical monodrama of passion represents a new stage and scene" (Notes; Hyder SR 23). His verses needed an audience, and before the publication of Poems and Ballads: 1 Monckton-Milnes (later Lord Houghton) orchestrated private readings by Swinburne, as an indication of future performance (Lafourcade ALB 97).<sup>1</sup> However, neither the Pythia nor Swinburne was a true actor since each was only a channel of communication, and neither was sensitive to the reactions of the audience.<sup>2</sup> Swinburne, like the Pythia, spoke, not for himself, but under the inspiration of the higher power; thus, if we are to consider Poems and Ballads:1 as performance, we must, in view of Swinburne's Sapphic possession, consider it as one belonging to Sappho, and *produced* by Swinburne, rather as in the poem, "Pasiphae" Daedalus produces the carved bull for the Cretan queen for a performance of the sexual act. As the Pythia had been responsible for what might be termed "The Apollo Show", Swinburne's role was to produce and direct "The Sappho Show." What sort of show would it be?

In Poems and Ballads:1 we have seen how Sappho's triumph as aberrant muse turns her into the protagonist of the volume; it is she who is constantly changing her costume, presents herself in the form of differing anti-heroines, not only as a participant of actual theatre as in "Stage Love" or "The Masque of Queen Bersabe", but throughout the volume, as she enacts and re-enacts different personae: Venus, Dolores, Faustine and Phaedra, to mention just a few. Indeed, her centuries-old reputation for versatility in enacting significant roles allows her to vivify Poems

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<sup>1</sup> McGann comments on the Poems and Ballads:1 specifically in terms of performance: "For Swinburne had tried to launch a public performance as Baudelaire had not" (205).

<sup>2</sup> Swinburne was a poor actor: Clara Watts-Dunton who had to sit through Swinburne's readings of Dickens later in his life writes: "Unfortunately the Dickens readings to which Swinburne so insistently treated us were not at all calculated to create an enthusiasm" (137). His actual recitations were not very successful. Henry Adams writes in his autobiography: "They knew not what to make of his rhetorical recitations....which he declared as though they were books of the Iliad" (141).

and Ballads:1 in the way that a celebrity taking over a traditional actor's role makes the play into an event. But, as we saw in Chapter 4, the muse is both "process and product", she is not only the performer, but also the performance itself, and thus the whole volume becomes her show. It is with the effect of this Sappho Show that I am now concerned.

As we saw in the first chapter, while particular interest was shown in Sappho's dramatic possibilities in the Nineteenth Century, her theatrical history stretched back into Antiquity and it is to Sappho's performance in a Greek context that I shall be concerned. Among her many performances in the Ancient World, (for example, her recitation and song, her re-enactment at symposia, her ribald representation in Athenian comedy, and of course, her leap from the Leucadian Cliff), there was a particular association with ancient religious performance through lyrical presentation at festivals and partheneia.<sup>3</sup> And, as we have seen, Swinburne's Sappho associates herself with the rites presided over by Cybele and Dionysus, and it is in this context that I shall read Poems and Ballads:1.

I start at the point where the priest/ess leaves the sacred precincts, "the chapels unknown of the sun", as they are described in "Dolores", in order to initiate festivities in the manner of the priestess of Eleusis. This is a particularly appropriate starting point since we have seen in "At Eleusis" how the poet/priest by associating him/herself with Celeus, has become reduced to acting as "a helper" in the rites of Demeter, as he searches for poetic fertility. Joan Brett-Connolly describes the original ceremony:

In the September of every year she [the priestess] would set out from the great sanctuary at Eleusis and march in procession some eighteen miles to the centre of Athens ... the image of the priestess arriving at Athens to signify the start of the Eleusinian mysteries was a sensational event that occurred annually for nearly two thousand years. (64)

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<sup>3</sup> See Williamson: "Sex and Girls' Choruses" (119-125) and "Festivals and Deities" (126-128) and Jane McIntosh Snyder: "Sappho's Other Lyric Themes" (97-108).

It is as such “a sensational event” I read Poems and Ballads:1. However, as we have seen in Chapter 4, Sappho’s presence is not only connected with Cybele and the Eleusinian mysteries, but through her maenadic persona, she is also associated with Dionysus, and in considering Poems and Ballads:1 as a form of religious revelry, I refer to the Dionysia, the Great Athenian festival that celebrated Dionysus through theatre.<sup>4</sup> Like the Eleusinian Mysteries, the five day festival began with processional behaviour: the escorting of the statue of Dionysus, animal sacrifice, dancing and the visiting of local shrines; the final night consisted of revelry: “after dark, men escorted by torches and accompanied by the music of flutes and harps, went out singing and dancing in the streets”(Parke 128). This revelry was termed “Komos”. It is in such a context that I wish to place Poems and Ballads: 1, and I shall read the volume as “Sapphic Komos”, a form of Bacchanal, licentious revelry connected with the worship of the old gods, and performed in their honour, through the mediating presence of Sappho. What, then, will be the nature of this event and what will be the purpose of such a reading?

Firstly, I shall utilise the reading to develop the arguments that I have presented so far, and show how the volume acts as a triumphant celebration of Swinburne’s Sapphic possession, the emergence of the libido in the form of the muse and its triumphant orgasmic expression in the search for an alternative sublime. I shall argue for the importance of Sapphic Komos for achieving a number of outcomes: the celebration of an aberrant sublime, its demand for a reciprocal response from the readers, an insistence on their involvement in the Komos and the emergence of an unsettling topos where life and lyric become interchangeable. Such a reading will, I hope, tease out the true significance of the volume and account for the real reasons for its hostile reception.

In order to read the volume in terms of Komos, I start by considering a simpler form of revelry, that of carnival. Utilising Bakhtian discourse, I shall look at Poems and Ballads:1 in terms of the carnivalesque. Then, in order to establish the peculiar celebratory nature of Sapphic Komos, I draw from Sappho’s Greek roots and further define it through Bacchanal. I end by a close

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<sup>4</sup> For a thorough description of the Dionysia and its importance see H.W. Parke (126 -136).

examination of “Itylus” to explicate my arguments and to show the significance of reading the volume in this way.

### **Swinburne, Sappho, and the carnivalesque**

The obvious parallels between Poems and Ballads:1 and carnival are not hard to find. The most immediate is an insistence on the ephemeral. It is perhaps “Ballad of Burdens” with its theme: “Life is sweet, / But after life is death” that expounds the Epicurean philosophy of carnival most clearly, but the trope is present throughout the volume. In “Anima Anceps”, for example, the poet urges: “Live like the swallow” Today will die tomorrow / Time stoops for no man’s lure.” In an ambience where “Delight ... lives an hour, / And love... lives a day”, the objective must be to “snare the bird Delight” (“Before Dawn”). The celebration of libido is as integral to carnival as it is central to the intercourse of poet and muse: Sappho’s assertion in “Anactoria”: “...my blood strengthens and my veins abound” might be the mantra of the revellers as they too search for an alternative sublime.

Predominant Sapphic constructs which we have met in the previous chapters in the course of following Swinburne’s Sapphic possession, also have much in common with carnival: Sapphic Fracture and Lability, particularly shown in Swinburne’s mimicking of her antonyms, all find their place in the *melée* of carnival where normal boundaries are transgressed and merged. Sapphic Aberrance, too, is reflected, as the revellers cross gender in dress and action, and adopt alternative sexual personae, as Sappho has done throughout the volume.<sup>5</sup> Associated Sapphic tropes of trance, unconsciousness, hysteria, madness and mesmerism (see last chapter) are all reflected in the ambience of carnival. A particular piece of medieval carnival is enacted in the skewed miracle play: “The Masque of Queen Bersabe”. However, the carnivalesque nature of Poems and Ballads:1 requires a more detailed explication, and I refer first to Alexander Orloff and show how the predominant tropes that he describes are reflected in Poems and Ballads:1.

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<sup>5</sup> As this has been discussed in the previous chapters, I offer just a few examples of poems which contain Sapphic constructs: aberrance/gender-crossing: “Hermaphroditus” and “Fragoletta”; the dominatrix: “Dolores” and “Faustine”; the phallic woman: “Laus Veneris”; the sadist: “Satia Te Sanguine”; the masochist: “Anactoria”.



This is a magical time outside of time in which one and all are changed, everything is reversed, inverted backwards, inside out, a period of paradox where opposites unite, where order is disorder, harmony dissonance, where profanity is sacred, where no laws and no taboos are valid. This is a time of excess, overflowing emotions, unrestrained folly, joy and anger, kindness and cruelty – a mad fleeting moment where life phrenetically embraces death in a sacred dance of creation. (15)

In the twenty-third stanza of “Dolores” we see many of these tropes: reversal and paradox: “Pain melted in tears and was pleasure”; harmony and dissonance: “And they laughed changing hands in the measure, / And they mixed and made peace after strife”; the exchange of the profane and the sacred: “In the darkness they murmured and mingled, / Our Lady of Pain”; the interchange of life and death: “Death tingled with blood and was life”; “a sense of the “mad fleeting moment”: “Like lovers they melted and tingled.”

In Rabelais and his World Mikhail Bakhtin shows how the Grotesque forms an integral part of carnival, and as we have seen, Swinburne himself had a particular interest in the Grotesque, as evinced, for instance, in his membership of the Cannibal Club and his obsession with de Sade; he would have undoubtedly read his admired Gautier’s anthology, “Les Grotesques”; Bakhtin cites Hugo’s own particular interest in the Grotesque (43), and the opening scene of “The Hunchback of Notre Dame”, so much admired by Swinburne, is set in carnival.<sup>6</sup> We can see a number of incidents of the Grotesque pinpointed by Bakhtin, which would have been particularly apposite to Swinburne, (who admired Rabelais and translated from him), for example, there is a parallel between the description of the Catchpoles who earn their living by subjecting themselves to thrashing (197-207) and Swinburne’s personal response to flagellation (discussed in Chapter 2).<sup>7</sup> Swinburne’s attraction to the Grotesque was also reflected in his

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<sup>6</sup> “For the whole forenoon that book was never out of his sight. If it lay on the table his eyes were always wandering to it. The fascination of first love was nothing to this fascination” (William Bell-Scott: Autobiographical Notes: 2:16).

<sup>7</sup> For a complete list of Swinburne’s flagellation writings see Rooksby (34).

burlesques such as “La Fille du Policeman” and “La Soeur de la Reine”. His early verse plays too, particularly, The Unhappy Revenge and The Queen Mother, show a fascination with the spectacle of the macabre; but it was in Sappho, in her fracture, aberrance and dead body, that Swinburne found his own particular form of the grotesque, and in the carnival of Poems and Ballads:1 he could celebrate it in its many forms.<sup>8</sup>

“Rococo” perhaps, gives the best instance of a whole poem that sees the emergence of Sapphic carnival from the Bakhtian Grotesque, and the poem as a whole responds both to Bakhtin’s own words on the interpretation of carnival in rococo literature, and reveals the presence of Sappho. Bakhtin asserts:

...here the gay positive tone of laughter is preserved. But everything is reduced to “chamber” lightness and intimacy...the indecency of the marketplace is transformed into erotic frivolity...and yet, in the hedonistic “boudoir” atmosphere a few sparks of the carnival fires which burn up hell have been preserved. (119)

The opening lines: “Take hands and part with laughter; / Touch lips and part with tears”, express Sappho’s own interest in antonyms and the mood of carnival: “the gay positive tone of laughter”, and remarkably reflect an instance of the oxymoronic tone of Rabelais writing, specifically pinpointed by Bakhtin: “the bride weeping for laughter, laughing for tears” (206). “The hedonistic ‘boudoir’ atmosphere and the sparks of the carnival fires” can be seen in “the hidden places” of “Rococo” and return us to the hell-horsel of Sappho/Venus where the gateways “smoke with fume of flowers and fires” and whose “little chambers” “drip with

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<sup>8</sup> In the course of researching carnival I came across an interesting article by Pamela Franco entitled “The Unruly Woman in Nineteenth-Century Trinidad Carnival.” While there would appear to be no connection with Swinburne and Trinidad, I found that his Great Uncle Henry Swinburne lived and died in Trinidad in 1803, and as Swinburne was particularly fond of his grandfather (Henry’s brother), I wondered whether any tales of carnival had come to the boy from him, and gave him an early appetite for the figure of the unruly woman enacted in Trinidadian carnival since she is “desirable to maskers, because, theoretically, she provides them with free range to push the envelope of transgression without fear of any serious repercussions”(61). In other words, she performs a function similar to Swinburne’s Sapphic dominatrix. However, this is mere speculation.

flower-like red” (“*Laus Veneris*”). Bakhtin also discusses Kayser’s theory of the Grotesque as a form of expressing the id (49), and this poem, perhaps more than any other in the volume, valorises the violent surging of the libido as it seeks release: “A single throb of pleasure, / A single pulse of pain” is felt throughout, and it is expressed through the relentless shuddering iambics and double rhymes, which rehearse the expression of Swinburne’s own libido, as it is turned into verse by the agency of the Sapphic muse. It can be best appreciated in the seventh stanza where the throbbing is marked by the “Sapphic” snake (“that hides and hisses”) and where the “purpler blood of pain” that “throbs through the heart of pleasure” is reminiscent of Sappho’s role as flagellator and her own reference to eros as “bitter-sweet” (Fragment 130).

Now, when we look at *Poems and Ballads:1* as a whole we can see the outline of a Sapphic carnival, a “sensational event” resembling that initiated by the priestess as she made her way towards Eleusis: We see the garlanded revellers: “Was it myrtle or poppy thy garland was woven with, O my Dolores” (“*Hesperia*”); flowers are thrown: “scattered roses, awful roses” (“*Sapphics*”); music plays: (significantly Sappho’s lyre), “All the feet of the hours that sound as a single lyre / Dropped and deep in the flowers” (“*Hymn to Proserpine*”); there is fire, spice and incense: “Burnt spices flash and burnt wine hisses / The breathing flame’s mouthing curls and hisses” (“*Ilicet*”); there are references to narcoticism, “where between sleep and life some brief space is” (“*Hermaphroditus*”); strange effigies are presented: “a graven image of desire” (“*A Cameo*”) and Lucrezia Borgia on her bier (“*Ballad of Death*”). Women masquerade as birds (“*Itylus*”) and the hermaphrodite comes forth (“*Fragoletta*”).

### **Critics at the Carnival**

The carnivalesque lying at the heart of *Poems and Ballads:1* was immediately identified and reviled by contemporary critics. Thomas Spencer Baynes writing in the *Edinburgh Review*

(1871) explicitly describes it:

...burning tresses, curled eyelids, bruising intertwined lips, insatiate mouth, hard sweet kisses, fleece-white shoulders, flower-soft fingers, fierce lithe hands, winding arms, bright bosoms strained and bare, straight soft flanks, slender feet, and quivering blood, fierce midnights, and famishing tomorrows. (83)

Significantly, he adds, “These subjects represent in Mr Swinburne’s pages the very *carnival* of criminal riot and delirious confusion” (emphasis added).<sup>9</sup> This is strong language indeed, but what was it about this carnival to raise such anger? Admittedly, the state of carnival gave licence to dangerous aspects that have already been discussed in the previous chapter: the dispensing of didacticism, morality, or clarity, and an association with irrational states and inherent brokenness; but Tennyson and Browning had, to some degree, already suggested a carnivalesque approach through the dramatic monologue, whose masquerade and use of prosopopeia were used to reveal states of madness or abnormality, which might or might not, reflect the poet’s own state of mind. However, the carnival of Poems and Ballads:1, while sharing many characteristics of the dramatic monologue, (a poetic presence sensed disguised behind multiple voices; an involvement with the aberrant; a privileging of fragmentariness; an abrogation of moral responsibility), goes further, it has a more immediate effect and outs a specific form of pleasure, one which Baynes senses when he describes the verse in terms of “luxurious abandonment and corrupted passion” (91). In fact, it asserts the carnivalesque celebration of libido as central to lyric. “*Satia Te Sanguine*” provides a particularly good example of this:

You thrill as his pulses dwindle,  
You brighten and warm as he bleeds,  
With insatiable eyes that kindle  
And insatiable mouth that feeds.

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<sup>9</sup> See also the comment of the writer in the Pall Mall Gazette: “He has since published a volume full of mad and miserable indecency. Otway raving fine verse in Bedlam is not a more pitiable spectacle, a less pitiable spectacle than Swinburne publicly obscene” (9-10).

There is a feverish celebratory delight of the carnivalesque in the verbs, “thrill”, “brighten” and “warm.” Although Swinburne is ostensibly referring to the beloved, his or her identity is never mentioned, and the use of the pronoun “we (“You are crueller, you that *we* love...”) turns the beloved into a generalised force of the uncompromising nature of libido in general, an urge that is “crueller... / Than hatred, hunger or death”. This is a celebration of the libido in all its aspects, and it pinpoints the unmentionable side of pleasure.

It was this unashamed carnivalesque outing of the libido that infuriated: as Thäis Morgan says, “Swinburne’s work hit a very tender spot in the Victorian conscience: a consciousness of the gap between sexual practice and moral discourse” (“Swinburne’s Dramatic Monologues” 176). However, there are two things to note here: firstly that it is not Swinburne on his own who “enables the tender spot to be hit”, because he himself is constitutionally incapable of writing on sexuality from his own experience, but he is enabled by the presence of Sappho because, as we have seen, the verse is the result of his intercourse with her, and Poems and Ballads:1 speaks of his libido through the libido of Sappho: the carnival is composed by Sappho, it is *her* show, and it is *her* presence that makes it “hit the spot.” It is *her* nuances, *her* echoes within Swinburne’s verse that enables this identification. And it is this labile presence of Sappho that effects the involuntary reciprocal response from the reader. But how in fact did Sappho involve the reader in *her* carnival? Can we be sure that this presence was, in fact, recognised by the readers of Poems and Ballads:1?

In Chapter 1, we saw how omnipresent Sappho was in both visual image and in text; how her constructs ranged from sublime versifier to pornographic object, and how eagerly her constructs were seized upon, and how various were the uses made of them. Her presence was so familiar that it could be argued that in a lesser respect the Victorian cultural imagination, like that of Swinburne, was itself possessed by Sappho; the form of her possession was double: she possessed an authority incontrovertibly established, and an unseen, but strongly felt power over the imagination. Thus, in Poems and Ballads: 1 the triumphant presence of Sappho was instantly recognisable, not simply as Swinburne’s muse, but in a variety of familiar, often coded constructs: her Hellenism, as we have seen in previous chapters, offered a means of implying

that which might not be spoken of, while her lyrical persona had also given her licence not allowed to the writer of prose. Thaïs Morgan, in her identification of “minoritizing discourse”, describes such a coded effect:

Briefly defined, a minoritizing discourse is one in which the solidarity – and the essential likeness – of a group that perceives itself to be in a minority position is presupposed and invoked at the same time as it is being constructed in the discourse itself. (“Reimagining Masculinities” 316)

However, this is not quite the case with Poems and Ballads:1 since Sappho’s presence was familiar to a large minority: Swinburne’s male readers had received a Classical education and, as we saw in Chapter 1, knew Sappho as a signifier of the other side of the Greek, but, as in the minoritizing discourse, the Sapphic presence *said* much more than Swinburne could publicly admit to, and struck home in a way that was much more forceful to a large number of his readers: it had the power to “strike and sting” the public memory, as it had Swinburne’s own, giving a public voice to secret anxieties and desires. John Morley, writing in the Saturday Review cries:

...he has revealed to the world a mind all aflame with the feverish carnality of a schoolboy over the dirtiest passages of Lemprière. It is not every poet who would ask us all to go hear him tuning his lyre in a sty. It is not everybody who would care to let the world know that he found the most delicious food for poetic reflection in the practices of the great island of the Aegean [Lesbos], in the habits of Messalina, of Faustina, of Pasiphae. (Morley 23)

In this comment Morley unwittingly describes, as if it were, an acknowledged common practice, the prurient accessing of sex through the forbidden side of the Classics, and that Sappho was the subject of such exploration. In citing Messalina, Faustina and Pasiphae along with Sappho, he

shows that he has recognised her and her metamorphosing constructs of uninhibited sexuality.<sup>10</sup> But she was also recognised as a signifier of the sublime: we saw in the last chapter how Thomas Baynes, critic of the Edinburgh Review had implicitly acknowledged Sappho's presence and threatening sublimity in Poems and Ballads: 1.<sup>11</sup> Sappho was recognised as signifier of the sublime and of the sexual, and her presence asserted that both lay intertwined at the heart of lyric.

Kathy Psomiades comments: "By unveiling the erotic body of art in a sensational public display, it threatens bourgeois codes of decorum. In so doing it takes part in the interplay between repression and liberation that characterises the discourse on sexuality in bourgeois culture" (Beauty's Body 71). But, as we saw in Chapter 4, in Poems and Ballads: 1 this erotic body of art *is* Sappho: Sappho the muse, Sappho the finished artefact and Sappho in her constructs of dominatrix. And this sensational public display is her carnival. It is Sappho as muse and signifier of eros, who enables this new definition of poetic pleasure. When the carnival throbs with "A single sob of pleasure, / A single pulse of pain", Sappho bids us celebrate the swelling libido, "the bitter-sweet irresistible creature", in all its forms, to subject ourselves to the joy and terror of the carnival dance that she herself has experienced and described as a form of the danse macabre: "Once again limb-loosening Love makes me tremble", and which is now mimicked in Poems and Ballads: 1. In this carnival "the lost white feverish limbs of the Lesbian Sappho" are held triumphantly aloft as the revellers whirl on their way. The sort of poetic pleasure that is now on offer is subject to Sappho and her constructs and to the swelling libido that she enacts.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The mention of Pasiphae is significant since she does not appear in Poems and Ballads:1, but in a pamphlet printed for private circulation; it would seem that the critic had familiarised himself with it.

<sup>11</sup> "His pages are stinging nerves, burning veins, and thundering pulses; of physical influences and sensuous agitations that dazzle and blind, deafen and stun, torture and stupefy"(90).

<sup>12</sup> This is not the same as "Art for Art's Sake" since Swinburne's art is, as we have seen, primarily the result of an expression of the libido, i.e. its result, rather than its own *raison d'être*.

Although, as Armstrong points out, Victorian critics did not insist on poetry having a didactic purpose, they were very concerned that there should be a purpose – a serious purpose – although they were not at all sure what that purpose might be (Victorian Scrutinies 11-12). Pleasure might be permitted, as a part of that elusive quest, a feeling akin to that stated by Horace in his Ars Poetica: “either to profit or to please or to blend in one the delightful or the useful” (139). Pleasure might sugar of the pill, ease the path to an unspecified sublime.<sup>13</sup> Now, since Poems and Ballads: 1 is an expression of the libido, a carnivalesque revelry, it would seem to valorise only the sugar; however, although it refuses to offer Horace’s “profit”, it cannot be dismissed as Coventry Patmore does the work of the Spasmodics:

Sugar-plums, quick-silvered globes, oranges, gimcracks, and lighted candles are not more incongruous ornaments to the stunted fir tree which they decorate for the nonce at a Christmas party than the tinsel thoughts and images which illustrate the subjects chosen by these poets. (Armstrong Victorian Scrutinies 49)

The carnivalesque trappings of Poems and Ballads: 1 do not adorn a stunted tree, but serve instead to offer a glimpse of a sublime forest: “a place of wind and flowers, / Full of sweet trees and the colour of glad grass.” The carnival has a purpose: in its celebration of the many facets of the libido it leads to a consummation of a sublime, but it is, we have seen, an aberrant sublime. The author of the unsigned article in the London Review admits as much when he claims Swinburne has “drenched himself in the worst creations of Parisian literature... until he can see scarcely anything in the world beyond it, but lust, bitterness and despair.” However, he adds: “Being a poet, he sees beauty also of necessity; and this is the one redeeming feature in what would otherwise be a *carnival* of ugly shapes” (130; emphasis added). Although he does not like to admit it, he has identified the carnival as Sappho’s (since she is a well-known in the context of “Parisian literature”), and he also seen that out of “lust, bitterness and despair” the sublime has emerged.

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<sup>13</sup> Bristow quotes from Coleridge’s Biographia Literaria: “A poem is that species of composition which is opposed to works of science by proposing for its immediate object pleasure not truth” and he points out how central this assertion was to the thinking of both Hallam and Mill (19-20).



This is a carnival that cannot be contained within the boundaries of the page, it will demand a reciprocal response. The critics hastened to repudiate such an effect and to distance themselves from the pleasures of the carnivalesque. Baynes thundered: “It is the atmosphere not of nature or of healthy, not of natural and healthful enjoyment at all, but of luxurious abandonment and corrupted passion” (91). The intended implication is, of course, that *he* wants no part of it. The enticing presence of Sappho in Poems and Ballads: 1 had guaranteed a ready audience and had also legitimised listening to the unmentionable other. The readers were quite prepared to view The Sappho Show – at a distance; indeed, having read Lamprière, in all probability, relished the prospect of pleasurable titillation of “seeing the Lesbians kissing across their smitten / Lutes with lips more sweet than the sound of lute strings” (“Sapphics”), while, at the same time, keeping their own respectability unimpeached. However, this was exactly what the Sapphic carnival would prevent: the presence of the Sapphic muse had a more complex and threatening role and was not going to allow the readers the easy ride they expected; they were not to be allowed as disinterested spectators to enjoy pruriently from a safe distance the expected titillation. The carnival shows that Sappho’s constructs, particularly those concerned with sexuality, did not belong exclusively to a female “poetess” many eons dead, but revealed uncanny reflections of the male reader’s own unspoken desires – desires that he would secretly like to see satisfied; in fact, it demanded a reciprocal response; it demanded that the spectators join the carnival and celebrate its libido.

I return to Morley’s comment discussed above: “It is not everybody who would care to let the world know that he found the most delicious food for poetic reflection in the practices of the great island of the Aegean.” This is an interesting comment; in the first place he unwittingly reveals the danger he sees to himself: the shame lies in the *publicising* of the yearnings of the male libido, usually so comfortably hidden away; there is something more than irony in the words, “the most delicious food”; could it be that he too longs to eat of it? We see a similar longing in a later comment: “He [Swinburne] is like ... a painter who should exclude every colour but a blaring red and green, as *of sour fruit*” (Hyder TCH 26, emphasis added). Like Aesop’s fox, he transfers his own bitterness at the unavailability of the fruit to the fruit itself. In

“August” he is told, “the warm smell of the fruit was good”; he too, like Adam, desires to taste this delicious apple, so enticing and so poisonous, but he does not want anyone to know this. Morley is not speaking for Swinburne, but for himself, when he uses the words: “It is not everybody who would care to let the world know ...” It is, in fact, *he* who secretly possesses “a mind all aflame with the dirtiest passages of *Lamprière*” (23 ); the carnival has affected him with a longing to emulate Laura in Christina Rossetti’s “Goblin Market” “who sucked and sucked and sucked the more / Fruits which that unknown orchard bore”(134-5; 414).

The great threat posed by Poems and Ballads: 1 was its enticement held out to the readers to join the Sapphic carnival, and by so doing, they must “let the world know” that they too were prepared to publicly acknowledge the libido in all its aberrance *within themselves*.<sup>14</sup> They will have to publicly admit to sharing Faustine’s sadistic pleasure as she avidly watches the death of the gladiators in “the steaming drift of dust”; they must admit to a prurient desire to watch the beheading of St Dorothy, to gloat as “Out of her throat the tender blood full red / Fell suddenly through all her long soft hair”, as the spectacle is so enticingly presented in heroic couplets, and offered for the reader’s delectation. When in “Anactoria” Sappho cries: “my blood strengthens, my veins abound”, the insistent force of the *Metre Mistress*’ iambic pentameters transfers the effect to the reader. Maxwell comments on this invasive force:

Swinburne invests poetic language with surprisingly active agency – it assaults the reader – and certainly this seems to correspond to the ways in which his verse represents itself and is commonly represented as it makes a concerted bid to penetrate, ensnare, win over, charm, seduce the witting or unwitting reader. (SSS 89)

I regard this “active agency” with its seductive charms, as the presence of Sappho who conducts the readers along in her revelry; her lyric inspiration, her metrical effects and her enticing construct allure them, as they have allured Swinburne himself. She works on their psyches, and they are affected like Aholibah:

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<sup>14</sup> As Swinburne points out in his polemic against the critics: “I would fain know...what congenial carrion they smell” (Hyder SR19).

Yea, in the woven guest- chamber  
And by the painted passages  
Where the strange gracious paintings were,  
State upon state of companies,  
There came upon thee the lust of these.

“The woven guest chamber”, “the painted passages”, “the strange gracious paintings” are like representations of the libido, behind which stands the muse, Sappho; the written word now takes on a life of its own, and fills the readers, like Aholibah, with desire to satisfy the lust these vivified representations inspire: “Thy mouth was leant upon the wall, / Against the painted mouth thy chin / Touched the hair’s painted curve and fall.” The result is not only to bring the readers to a state of sexual arousal, but to infect them with a desire for the aberrant. The anonymous writer of the London Review exclaims that Swinburne will “bid us revel like men in plague time” (Hyder TCH 36). He recoils with apparent horror from the contagious effect of the aberrant Sublime, as he sees himself *bidden* to revel in it, invited to *celebrate* what he fears in society, and in himself; he is invited to join in a carnival that links both the sublime and the grotesque. In Rabelais Bakhtin describes the episode in which Master Janotus seeks the return of the stolen bells, taking with him “five or six servile and artless Master of Arts” who in the carnival atmosphere “are transformed into clowns, into a gay grotesque procession” (216). The writer fears “the gay grotesque procession” and even more does he fear his own role within it. In discussing Sappho’s voice in “Anactoria” Thaïs Morgan claims:

“Sappho triumphs over the conservative reader when she reminds us in the last moments of her monologue, that we have silently been party to the aberrations of her lovemaking as well as the revolt against cultural norms which her speech and behaviour imply...” (“Swinburne’s Dramatic Monologues” 191).

I would go further than Morgan and claim that Sappho’s omnipresence in the volume does more than involve the reader in *silent* prurience; it entices the reader to participate in a dizzying

carnival of bizarre sexuality in which it demands a dissolution of the comfortable distinction between private and public. Morgan comments on “*Laus Veneris*”: “In effect, the underworld of Venus is a mythical version of the Victorian sexual underground” (“*Swinburne’s Dramatic Monologues*” 188). It is the outing of the enjoyment of secret sexual practices, aberrant sexual practices (so clearly described by Stephen Marcus in *The Other Victorians*), and the blending of two apparently incompatible set of mores through the power of Sappho, that was so threatening.<sup>15</sup> But then, as Page du Bois points out, Sappho had always been a disruptive figure (25). In the lyrical carnival of *Poems and Ballads: 1* Sappho offers a showing of all her constructs, refusing to permit a separation between the respectable public textbook images and her privately savoured sexuality.

Maxwell comments: “Because of the way Swinburne’s verse has particular designs on the sensibility of readers – their bodies and minds – there can arise a sense that they are not quite sure of where their identities and those of the poems begin and end” (SSS 89). Bakhtin describes a similar merging of joy and apprehension in medieval carnival: “...it is impossible to determine where the defeat of fear will end and where joyous recreation will begin” (91). I see this particular bringing together of public and private as activated by the Sapphic presence in the carnival, since, as we saw in Chapter 1, her notable ability to glide from construct to construct allowed her to position herself both within and without the area of lyric, to be viewed as actual woman, or body of verse. It is this lability, this hinterland that Sappho and her lyric occupy, that enables a carnivalesque space in which the thrusting libido inherent in the verse spills over to mingle with the readers’ own, so that the two become indistinguishable; it is this labile presence of Sappho within Swinburne’s lyric that produces the same “delicate and desirable” effect that “the shapes upon either wall” had upon Aholibah, enabling the same slippage between art and life, and allowing the readers a glimpse of their own sublime. However, this experience will come at a price. In his polemic against *Poems and Ballads: 1* in the *Saturday Review* John Morley claims:

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<sup>15</sup> Morse Peckham points out: “...it is evident that there were two sexual cultures in nineteenth-century Europe: a public culture of constraint and a private one of license” (*Victorian Counterculture*. 258).

There is no finer effect of poetry *than to recall* to the minds of men the *bounds that have been set to the scope of their sight* and sense, to inspire their imagination with a vivid consciousness of the size and the wonders and the strange remote companionship of the world of force and growth and form *outside of man*. (Hyder TCH 29; emphasis added)

What Morley requires is the experience of the sublime without actually engaging with it, to experience vicariously that which is “outside of man” through the medium of verse, but from within the safety of “bounds that have been set”, a roped-off enclosure, as it were. What Poems and Ballads:1 insists on, is the crossing of these bounds and a joining in the carnival in all its diversity. And the Sapphic muse urges the reader to cross the divide. Alfred Austin in his critique “Mr Swinburne” senses that the Sapphic muse, more frightening than Tennyson’s, will be successful:

But surely it will be said that Mr Swinburne’s muse is not feminine muse in the same sense that Mr Tennyson’s is? Surely he does not sing of love, women, and all that is concerned with and gathers about woman, in the same way Mr Tennyson does? Certainly not, but there is such a thing as ‘the one step further’. (Hyder TCH 103)

He sees that this Sapphic muse intends to unhook the dividing rope between verse and reality, and take him “the one step further” into the whirling madness of the carnival. Baynes cries: “It is a uniform glare of blinding light and dazzling colours. The main aim of art is equally defeated by such crude and untempered work” (90). The critic is (unwittingly) referring to the very exuberance of lyric necessary to reaching for the sublime.<sup>16</sup> He is made giddy by glimpses of it, and he is taken “the one step further”, protesting vehemently. But the work is not crude, nor is it “untempered”, it has been honed with exquisite “tact” akin to Sappho’s own, and it is, as we saw

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<sup>16</sup> “The extravagance of poetry includes its aspiration to what theorists since classical times have called the ‘sublime’; a revelation to what exceeds human capabilities of understanding, provokes awe or passionate intensity, gives the speaker a sense of something beyond human” (Jonathan Culler 76).

in Chapter 5, the combination of passion and tact that enables glimpses of the sublime. But viewing the sublime will not allow any hiding in the “background”, nor is there room for “relief or repose”. As Kenneth Craig says, “there are no footlights in carnival. Participants are simultaneously actors and audience, and all is dissolved in collective gaiety” (Reading Esther 115). “The main aim of art” is not “defeated”, it is the critic whose resistance is defeated. Maxwell makes this very point:

This boundary-blurring and subsequent difficulty in distinguishing one thing from its opposite becomes part of the experience of reading Swinburne. His poetry breaks down readers’ boundaries, not just in terms of their taboos and prejudices, but also by making a concerted effort to get into their spaces, to occupy or take up a space in their consciousness.” (SSAS 89)

Bakhtin makes a similar comment concerning medieval spectacle:

The basic carnival nucleus of this culture is by no means a purely artistic form, nor a spectacle and does not, generally speaking, belong to the sphere of art. It belongs to the borderline between art and life, it is life itself, but shaped according to certain patterns of play. (7)

It is in this Sapphic carnival, that such an in-between ground can be found, and when Buchanan claims, that Swinburne is “only a little mad boy letting off squibs”( FSOP 36), he sees these “patterns of play” and tries, in effect, to reduce Poems and Ballads:1 to the level of childishness. However, children’s play actually has the ability to inhabit a hinterland between the real and the imaginary, and the volume exercises a similar function, with its ability to draw the reader into a series of terrifying borderlands, areas that juxtapose sleep and death, madness and sanity, sleeping and waking. Such a hinterland is described in “The Two Dreams”: “Spice and scent”, the trampling underfoot by naked feet of “bud and blossom”, the beat of the drum suggested by the words “pounded”, the heightened excitement: “my blood filled with sharp and sweet”, the repetition of “thrilling”, the dancing movement “the mobile measure in my blood”, all suggest

carnival, and the insistent monosyllabic beat of the iambic couplets exerts the same power over the reader as over the speaker in the poem: “And blind between my dream and my desire / I seemed to stand and held my spirit still / Lest this should cease.” The readers do not want the verse to cease, they too wish to linger in this hinterland, where life and lyric merge, to experience “swift little pleasure pungent as a flame.” As the editor of the Portland Press comments wistfully: “Unfortunately he possesses an extraordinary grace and power of expression and a melodious felicity in the use of language, which sometimes invests his worse verses with a charm that half veils their vileness.” (advertising page 4 in A Song of Italy). He is forced to echo Longinus’ encomium of Sappho and admit the power of passion and tact in the aberrant sublime.

In her article, “Mixed Metaphor, Mixed Gender: Swinburne and the Victorian Critics”, Morgan comments: “the mid-Victorians made little difference between the rules for language use and the rules for moral conduct” (16), and she shows how the Victorians associated promiscuity in language with promiscuity in society. She comments, “Mixed metaphor, mixed genre: Swinburne poses a threat to the language, the literature and the social body of England” (18). But it is not Swinburne unaided who achieves this; it is the result of his possession by Sappho, and it is her carnival that reveals hidden desires in all their nakedness and brings them out into the public domain, acting as a signifier of them and also their embodiment, using her lyrical persona to declare them a fitting subject for verse and exhibiting them for perusal in her various aberrant forms; she presents herself as libido, an innate part of the human condition, a part of the reader too, one that the reader should celebrate. The anger aroused by Poems and Ballads: 1 resulted from the fact that Swinburne was revealing this Sapphic space, not merely as lyric, but as aberrance within the reader; that the two were in fact interchangeable. It is this that Alexander Hay Japp perceives when he declares Swinburne’s poems threaten to disrupt “ideas and forms which the common sense of the mass holds to be hallowed” (“The Morality of Literary Art” 173). When Buchanan objects to “the leg disease” he sees this seepage from verse to life.<sup>17</sup> He

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<sup>17</sup> “The leg as a disease is subtle, secret, diabolical... Is it any wonder that Leg-literature flourishes? There lies the seat of the cancer – there in the Bohemian fringe of society” (FSOP 7).

would like to keep “the lost white feverish limbs / Of the Lesbian Sappho *adrift*”, but they have emerged, the image of Sappho is held everywhere aloft in the carnival procession. Lyric has crossed into life; now indeed she has been removed “from the dusty shelves of libraries” (Hyder SR 101). And it is in the madness of Sapphic carnival that this cross-over takes place. In “Before Dawn” the poet describes the demands of carnival: the reader is advised that both pain and joy are intrinsic to the carnivalesque and its desire for the sublime defined as “the bird Delight”, and both demand acknowledgement within the rhythms of carnival, the quickening of “fleshly pulses”, and both require to be celebrated, “with hands that sting like fire”, within this shifting ground of lyric. The reader is bidden to follow the advice of the scholiast:

Your situation should now be compared with that of the Leader of the Muses himself as he appears when Sappho and Pindar in their songs deck him out with golden hair and lyre and send him drawn by swans to Mount Helicon to dance there with the Muses and Graces. (Fragment 208)

### **Sapphic Komos**

In my consideration of Poems and Ballads: 1 in terms of carnival, I have so far drawn from Bakhtin, but there is another aspect which Bakhtin virtually ignores: although he comments: “the *vendange* atmosphere entirely permeates the second part of *Gargantua*” (227), he nowhere mentions the influence of Dionysus and the performance of fertility rites which lie at the root of carnival.<sup>18</sup> But I shall now argue that the Greek presence of Sappho brings this most significant element to Poems and Ballads: 1 and gives it back the primeval force, the threatening darkness that may not be apparent in the exuberance of mere carnival. I shall argue that it is by reading

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<sup>18</sup> Allon White comments on the Dionysian influence: “The carnivalesque also presents a connection with new sources of energy, life and vitality – birth, copulation, abundance, fertility, excess. Indeed, it is this sense of the overflowing of libidinal energy associated with the moment of ‘carnival’ which makes it such a potent metaphor of social and symbolic transformation” (7). The word “carnival” is (arguably) derived from “*carus navalis*” the sacred ship in which the image of Dionysus was conveyed into Athens for the festival of Anthesterion. For a discussion of fertility rites as the root of carnival see Orloff (15-30).



Poems and Ballads: 1 in the context of Greek Komos and Bacchanal, that we can get a real understanding of its truly provocative nature.

Let us return again to the point where this chapter started, to the figure of the priest/ess leaving the precincts of the temple and the celebration of the associated rites that would initiate the Komos. Like carnival, this start of the mysteries was “a sensational event”, and like the celebration of carnival, it was associated with religion, but it was a very different sort of religious celebration than, say Easter celebrated in Catholic countries where a statue or image of the Virgin Mary, or a reliquary of some saint, might take centre stage. As we have seen, Poems and Ballads: 1 rejects “dead limbs of gibbeted saints” and replaces the Virgin with a series of Sapphic anti-virgins”. Indeed, in this it emulates the medieval “parodia sacra” pointed out by Bakhtin (14 and 85).<sup>19</sup> In “Dolores” and again in “At Ephesus”, we saw the Sapphic muse associated with Cybele, (see Chapter 4); in the former poem we are invited to observe (in both senses) the celebration of her Komos: “... from the midmost of Ida, from shady / Recesses that murmur at morn, / They have brought and baptized her, Our Lady / A goddess new-born.” Such a goddess and her attendant rites shocked the Roman establishment; I offer a comparison between the reactions of Victorian critics to Poems and Ballads: 1 with those of the Roman establishment to Cybele, since their extraordinary commonality indicates the nature of their mutual fear.

When the Roman officials first welcomed Cybele, Magna Mater, to their city, they knew little about the cult’s activities. What they soon learned shocked them because the rites in honour of the goddess were quite unlike the calm, orderly, methodical ceremonies of the state religion ... As soon as the Roman officials realised the nature of these cult activities, they undertook immediate measures to keep the cult tightly restricted. ( Jo-Ann Shelton 399)

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<sup>19</sup> Swinburne was obviously drawing from Lucretius: “the ancient Greek poets sang hymns to Mother Earth and portrayed her as seated in a chariot driving a team of lions ... And even now the image of the divine mother, clothed in such regalia, is carried throughout the world and inspires awe” (De Rerum Natura 2. 594-601).

What Milton terms decorum, which is the masterpiece to observe, is habitually violated in the most flagrant manner throughout his [Swinburne's] writings ... If the main characteristics of his writings were to be summed up in a single word it would be lawlessness or license ... ( Baynes 74-5)

We see the same fear breaking from the accepted canons of respectability: “the calm, orderly, methodical ceremonies of the state religion” becomes “the poet Milton”; and a surprise is in store for each: “the nature of these cult ceremonies” reveals itself as “shocking” and the respectable provenance of verse translates to “lawlessness”; there is the same desire to suppress the threat: “immediate measures” are required to maintain to keep the cult “tightly restricted”; “decorum” must be maintained.<sup>20</sup> However, this is not possible, if the cult participants or readers of lyric wish to experience the sublime, to join the thrill of the lion’s proximity, as they draw Cybele’s chariot, “bound and unfed”, they must become like “initiates to the cult [who] seemed to act in a state of emotional frenzy (Shelton 399).” They must themselves partake of the poet’s enthymia.

As we saw in Chapter 5, the reader is made aware of the (necessary) madness, not just of the poet, but the latent madness of the Sapphic dominatrix within Poems and Ballads: 1. Now Sappho’s Komos celebrates this state of madness, not just in the excitement of the carnival, but through the religious frenzy belonging to the cults of the old gods, by which the participants strive to reach the sublime. This is a deeper, more fundamental demand than that of mere carnival. The worship of Cybele celebrates the original life-force that Swinburne would later describe in “Hertha”: “I am that which began; / Out of me the years roll.” Commenting on the processional Komos accompanying the Eleusinian Mysteries, Brett-Conolly asserts: “The spectacle powerfully imprinted itself upon the collective memory of generations of Athenians;

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<sup>20</sup> In the introduction of Cybele into Rome we see a further similar cause of fear, the dread of effeminisation: Galli were eunuchs who had been castrated upon entering the service of the goddess ... And the priests called Galli were particularly offensive to the staid and sober Roman temperament” (Shelton 399). Austin echoes this: “But what have men – men brave, muscular, upright, chivalrous ... men with pride in their port, defiance in their eye, men daring, enduring, short of speech, and terrible in action – what have these to do with Mr Swinburne’s Venuses and Chastelards, his Anactorias and Faustines, his Dolores, his Sapphos and his Hermaphroditus” (“Mr Swinburne” TCH 96).

its highly associated symbolism bound initiates and sacred officials together in an intense group experience” (64). This was the effect demanded by Poems and Ballads: 1 with “its highly associated symbolism” coded through Sappho, it insisted on the celebration of a life-force that is common to all, that impinges on the “collective memory”; and it emanated from the primeval power of the Chthonian *female* gods, translated by the presence of Sappho. This was the Komos that lay at the heart of the verse, and which made it so enticing, and so terrifying.

As we saw in Chapter 4, while Sappho was associated with Cybele, in “Thalassius”, she was also particularly associated with the libido through the figure of the maenad. In “Faustine” this dangerous form of the Sapphic muse is seen directly associated with Dionysus/Bacchus: she is “woven by the fates” “like a Bacchanal” and placed next to Bacchus who “cast your mates and you / Wild grapes to glean.”<sup>21</sup> This presence of maenads, “the furred Bassarides”, “the shapeless earthly form of shapes” takes what Bakhtin describes as “the carnival of the night”, a further step into an uncharted region of the mind, into the darkest realm of Bacchanal in which “the carnivalesque becomes interiorized and individualized, related to private terror, isolation and insanity, rather than robust communal celebration” (White 171). In the earlier mention of “Aholibah” we saw how the art form became vivified and offered the enticement of the actual; but such an unnatural force also opens up the darkness of the mind with its lurking anxieties: “The shape of beasts and creeping things”; “Flat backs of worms and veined wings, / And the lewd bulk that sleeps and stings.”

In speaking of Dionysiac festivals, Nietzsche would say, “the most savage beasts of nature were here unleashed, even that repellent mixture of lust and cruelty which I have always held to be a witch’s brew” (19). It is this that the Sapphic Bacchanal will reveal, and it will utilise the maenad not only as associated with Swinburne’s libido, but as a potent signifier of the male reader’s own libido – something that Sussman notes in Carlyle: “these monstrous diseased females act out Carlyle’s deepest psycho-social anxiety” (21). And when Morley would dismiss

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<sup>21</sup> For Swinburne’s professed antipathy to, but reliance on, Euripides, see Rutland (201-202).

Swinburne as “the libidinous laureate of a band of satyrs” (Hyder 29), he actually inscribes the poet’s association with the life force of the god in all its forms.

The actual presence of the maenads in Poems and Ballads: 1 was immediately apparent to the outraged reader. In his critique “Mr Swinburne” Austin declares: “But it will not do to empty Olympus of its deities, fill it with tipsy Bacchanals and meretricious maenads, and then conceive that the idylls of the earth, earthy – idylls of the farm and the mill – have been gloriously surpassed” (Hyder TCH 96). However, Austin dare not explain why “it will not do”; he knows that the safe subjects *have been* “gloriously surpassed”, that the maenad indicates the way to her own space of darkness, the various forms of the maternal cave (described in the last chapter). As Gilbert and Gubar comment: “...to this shrine the initiate comes to hear the voices of darkness, the wisdom of inwardness” (93). Austin declares he will *not* be an initiate, but the very vehemence of his protestation indicates a prurient wish to see, to join the maenads. In the same paragraph he asks “Were the kisses that ‘burn and bite’ the everlasting themes of Homer, of Pindar or of the grand tragedians of their country?” He may be safe with Pythic Odes of Pindar, but he knows full well that both Homeric epics are concerned with the fatal effects of Helen’s adultery; moreover, he neglects to mention those towering figures of terrifying female sexuality, Clytemnestra in Sophocles’ Agamemnon and Medea in Euripides play of that name. He studiously avoids mentioning Euripides’ Bacchae whose very subject is the danger of ignoring sexuality, particularly female sexuality. This play has an extraordinary resonance with Austin’s fears since it demonstrates the same terrible attraction of the maenad for the prurient male. Dionysus asks Pentheus if he would “like to see those women sitting there together in the mountains?” And Pentheus replies: “Yes, indeed I would give a large sum of gold to see them.” Eagerly, he adds:

They tell me in the midst of each group of revellers stands a bowl full of wine; and the women go creeping off this way and that to lonely places and there give themselves to lecherous men, under the excuse that they are maenad priestesses; though in their ritual Aphrodite comes before Bacchus. (188)

Morley reveals a similarly prurient reaction: “We may ask of him whether there is really nothing in women worth singing about except ‘quivering flanks’ and ‘splendid supple thighs’, ‘hot sweet throats’ and ‘hotter hands than fire’ and ‘their blood as hot wan wine of love’” (Hyder TCH 24). This is a very Pentheusian view since it is obvious that Morley has carefully gone through the volume looking for examples of the wantonness that has so enticed the Thracian king in the Bacchae. Psomiades refers to this comment of Morley’s and asserts:

Removed from the contexts of the individual poems and brought together to typify Swinburnean femininity, these passages of description come together to make one colossal feminine figure for art and artistry, a figure recognised both by the poems themselves and by the volume’s reviewers (71).

I see these sexualised metonymic parts, as multiple maenadic instances of a Sapphic muse, and that it is she who is the colossal feminine figure who stands for and interprets art and artistry, and it is through her Komos that the volume gains its power over the reader. In the citation above, Morley, like Pentheus, wishes to experience the maenadic delight as signified by the Sapphic: “Ah, the singing, ah the delight, the passion”, and he longs to join “. . .the sound of lute strings / Mouth upon mouth and hand upon hand.” He has read all about it in “the dirtiest passages in *Lamprière*”.<sup>22</sup> Buchanan too, echoes Pentheus’ words: “This outrageous Bacchism advances on us like spreading fire”; he claims: “There it is [“leg literature”, i.e. literature in which the aberrant woman is pre-eminent] spreading daily like all cancerous diseases, foul in itself and spreading foulness” (FSOP 7). He continues to cite his own attraction and fear of the maenad – the attraction and fear of his own libido: “I attempt to describe Mr Swinburne; and lo! The Bacchanal screams, the sterile Dolores sweats, serpents dance, men and women wrench, wriggle and foam in an endless alliteration” (FSOP 80). In the mention of Dolores and the snakes and the technical skill, the “tact”, he manages to embrace a whole range of Sapphic constructs.

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<sup>22</sup> The actual reference reads: “The poetess has been censured for writing with that licentiousness and freedom which so much disgraced her character as a woman.”

This “wrenching” that worries Buchanan so much, reflects the violence of the libido pictured by Swinburne in “Thalassius”: “Red hands rent up the roots of old world trees”. Furthermore, it recalls Euripides’ horrifying description of the fate of Pentheus torn apart at the hands of the maenads and his own mother.<sup>23</sup> This tearing apart is a development of the carnivalesque. Bakhtin comments:

The scene of the scandal and decrowning of the prince – the carnival king, or more accurately the carnival bridegroom – is consistently portrayed as *a tearing to pieces*, as a typical carnivalistic ‘sacrificial’ dismemberment into parts ... Carnivalization allows [authors of the carnivalesque] to glimpse and bring to life aspects in the character and behaviour of people which, in the normal course of life, could not have revealed themselves. (Problems of Dostoevski’s Poetics 161-3; original emphasis)

But when the carnivalesque becomes the Bacchanal, the tearing apart become more fundamental, since it belongs to the implacable nature of the old gods, the castration and death demanded by Cybele, the sacrifice demanded by Dionysus through the maenad, and in the Bacchanal of Poems and Ballads:1 it is expressed through Sapphic fracture: intertextualising and echoing of her fragments; in Swinburne’s submission to the forms of fracture offered by the Metre Mistress in the employment of metre and rhythm; and the implicit fracture that is offered by the dominatrix in the depiction of sadomasochism, cruelty and violence. All this belongs equally to Bacchanal, Komos, lyric and the psyche. It cannot be denied. In the Bacchae Teiresias

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At last with a force like lightning, they tore down the branches of oak, and used these as levers, trying to tear out the tree’s roots. All their struggles were useless then Agave spoke to them: “Come, you maenads, stand round the tree and grip it. We must catch this climbing beast or he will reveal the secret dances of Dionysus. A thousand hands grasped the tree; and they tore it from the earth. Then from his high perch plunging and crashing to the ground came Pentheus, with one incessant scream as he understood what end was near ... she gripped his right arm between wrist and elbow; she set her foot against his ribs; and she tore his arm off by the shoulder. It was no strength of hers that did it; the god was in her fingers and made it easy. Ino was at him at the other side, tearing at his flesh and not Autonoe joined them, and the whole pack of raving women. (216-217)

comments on the demands made by Dionysus: "...the god has drawn no distinction between young and old, which should dance and which should not. He wishes to receive honour alike from all; he will not have his worship made a matter of nice calculation" (187-188). Swinburne makes the same claim: "...if literature is not to deal with the full life of man and the whole nature of things, let it be cast aside with the rods and rattles of childhood" (Hyder SR 30). However, "the full life of man" is a very circumspect description; Sapphic Bacchanal inscribes a more explicit description. When we looked earlier at "The Two Dreams" as an instance of the carnivalesque, we saw how it spoke of the libido emergent in carnival: "...all my blood is filled with sharp and sweet / ... through each limb there came / Swift little pleasures pungent as a flame"; the simile that explicates these lines reads: "As gold swoln grain fills out the husked wheat." This reference takes the experience into Bacchanal, into the realms of Dionysus, Demeter and Cybele, fertility gods, indiscriminately meting out life and death. Sapphic Bacchanal, then, makes for a much deeper, more threatening form of carnival because it outs the contrary aspects of the libido that Nietzsche would term "the scream of horror" heard "at the moment of supreme joy" (20), while still insisting on its celebration, because only by immersion in it, will the reader be able to experience the sublime, the extreme enrichment without which life is nothing. In fact, Swinburne precourses Nietzsche's words:

Under the influence of the narcotic potion hymned by all primitive men and peoples, or in the powerful approach of spring, joyfully penetrating the whole nature, those Dionysiac urges are awakened, and as they grow more intense, subjectivity becomes a complete forgetting of the self. In medieval Germany too, the same Dionysiac power sent singing and dancing throngs, constantly increasing, wandering from place to place ... some people either through lack of experience or obtuseness turn away in pity and contempt from phenomena such as these as from these folk diseases, bolstered by a sense of their own sanity; these poor creatures have no idea how blighted and ghostly this sanity of theirs sounds when the glowing life of the Dionysiac revellers thunders past them. (17)

We might compare Swinburne's own words in "The Triumph of Time" when he vividly describes different aspects of the "glowing life of the Dionysiac" force. There is the same emphasis on the intoxication of Dionysiac power and the same loss of self:

The pulse of war and the passion of wonder,  
The heavens that murmur, the sounds that shine,  
The stars that sing and the loves that thunder,  
The music burning at heart like wine,  
An armed archangel whose hands raise up  
All senses mixed in the spirits cup  
Till flesh and spirit are molten in sunder.

However, he is forced to conclude by admitting: "These things are over and no more mine". It would appear to be a sad irony that his own participation in the Bacchanal is partial, he has been only responsible for the event, he has been confined to the role of celibate priest in its initiation, since his impotence and subjection to his Sapphic muse has caused his virtual death, and has prevented his joining in the dance of the living, and has perforce, made his own celebration of fertility through the production of verse. But, after all, this may not be such a cause of sadness, Sappho does not regard it as such: "For it is not right that there should be lamentation in the house of those who serve the Muses. That would not be fitting for us" (Fragment 150).

We may pause here and reconfigure the picture of carnival suggested earlier and view it as a form of Sapphic-Bacchanal. We see the same roses and incense, garlands, snakes and the whirling crowd, but the Komos is now more threatening, dominated not only by "daughters of dreams and of stories", the relatively unthreatening "Felise and Yolande and Juliette" ("Dedication"), but as if by the presence of maenadic women from the Ancient World: Herodias, Aholibah, Cleopatra, Abihail, Azubah, Aholah, Ahinoam, Atarah, Semiramis, Hesione, Chrysothemis, Thomyris, Harhas, Myrrha, Pasiphae, Messalina, Amestris, Ephrath, Pasithea, Alaciel, Erigone, all suddenly appearing from the dead ("The Masque of Queen Bersabe"), and, of course, Sappho herself, her "face pale like faded fire" for it is she who



supplies the music: “My blood was hot wan wine of love / and My song’s sound the sound thereof, / The sound of the delight of it.” Momentarily we glimpse Swinburne himself “sat panther-throned beside Erigone”, before this dominatrix metamorphoses into the figure of Mary Gordon, and the throne is seen to be made of cardboard. This, after all, is a female production.

I conclude this chapter with a close reading of “Itylus” since, for me, this one poem clearly brings together and explicates the arguments and ideas I have discussed above.

### **Itylus: an instance of Sapphic Komos**

Ostensibly the poem refers to the fable of Itylus, most famously narrated by Ovid (Metamorphoses 6: 424-674).<sup>24</sup> There is no doubt that the presence of Sappho in the poem would have been recognised by the reader since her association with the nightingale was well known, as was the contrast between the bird’s unprepossessing physical appearance and the quality of her song (see Chapter 2). Barrett- Browning, for instance, describes herself as “little and black like Sappho” ( The Brownings’ Correspondence 8: 128). In the poem Swinburne implies this contrast: “... *tawny* body and *sweet small mouth*.” The more educated reader would have been able to make the same association between Sappho and the nightingale from the Sapphic fragments that had inspired Swinburne.<sup>25</sup> Then, echoes of Sappho’s fragments were easily discernible in the insistent echoing of juxtaposed tropes of remembering and forgetting and the coupling of life and death, the insistent leitmotif: “Till life forget and death remember.” The reader could have recognised less obvious Sapphic reference throughout the poem, for

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<sup>24</sup> Philomela, the daughter of Pandion, King of Athens is raped, and she has her tongue cut out by her brother-in-law, Tereus King of Thrace to prevent her from disclosing the crime; however, she manages to convey the story to her sister Procne by weaving the story into a piece of embroidery. Procne then kills her son Itys and serves the child’s flesh to his father as an act of vengeance against him. Pursued by Tereus, she is then turned into a swallow by the gods and her sister into a nightingale. In the earlier Greek version it is Procne who becomes the nightingale and Philomela who is the mother of Itys. The story is conflated with a further myth in which Aedon, daughter of Pandarus, envious of her sister Niobe for her many children, planned to kill one of them but instead mistakenly killed her own son, Itylus; she prayed in her grief to lose her human form and was changed into a nightingale.

<sup>25</sup> Lafourcade points out that the sources of Swinburne’s inspiration for “Itylus” was not only the legend itself, but also Fragments 135 and 136: “Why, Irana, does Pandion’s daughter, the swallow [wake me]? and “... the messenger of spring, the lovely-voiced nightingale”(449).

example: “And over my head the waves have met” recalls Sappho’s own drowning; there is an exquisite point of reference to Sappho’s lines referring to her own child: “I have a beautiful child who looks like golden flowers, my darling Cleis, for whom I would not take all Lydia or lovely...” (Fragment 132). In “Itylus” we are told of “the small slain body, the flower-like face”.

Through such links the readers would have associated the poem with Sappho, and become aware of the carnivalesque, since it has masquerade at its heart: the poet himself has changed gender and is disguised now as the woman Philomela and now as a female nightingale. As in carnival, the poem employs the constant repetition of joyous movement: Procne is “changing”, “light”, “fleeting”, “shifting” and “rapid”; there is a constant fading of one thing into another as different boundaries are transgressed: past and present: “Shall not the grief of the old time follow?”; silence and song: “Shall not the song thereof cleave to thy mouth?”; day and night: “clothed with the light of the night”; life and death: “till life forget and death remember”; forgetting and remembering: “till thou remember and I forget”; leaving and staying: “but thou wouldst tarry or I would follow.” The constant repetition of antonyms has a disorienting effect and it takes the readers, like intoxicated revellers, into a state of hallucination where all normality is suspended: are the swallow and nightingale actual *birds*, or are they women, are they alive or dead, what position do they hold in time and space, are they to be admired or blamed, is the lyric a celebration of joyfulness of life, or a lament for the cruelty of death?

“Itylus” effortlessly echoes the boundary-crossing of carnival, an impression that is aided by its dancing rhythm of iambs, dactyls and double internal rhyme.<sup>26</sup> The lightness of tone is such that the poem has been deemed eminently suitable for inclusion in school anthologies. Rutland, certainly, is eager to see it with all the innocent delight of a child at the carnival: “One of the best poems in the volume, and one of the most charming lyrics that Swinburne ever wrote, is that song which he made the nightingale sing to the swallow, an allusion to a barbarous myth in Greek poetry” (277). He continues his eulogy: “...the myth is one of the most revoltingly

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<sup>26</sup> See Lafourcade: “il s’ensuit que chaque strophe a au moins une double rime (en hollow) qui contribue beaucoup à l’effet plaintif et languissant de l’ensemble” (450). “He has contrived that each strophe has more or less a double rhyme (in hollow) which contributes greatly to the plaintive and languishing tone of the whole.”

gruesome and barbarous that could be imagined. But in Swinburne's hands it makes a delightful poem..." (279). Some half a century earlier the anonymous writer in "The London Review" had enthusiastically attested a similar view:

Let us turn from the worse to the better aspects of this volume. Nothing can exceed the beauty and lyrical sweetness of some of the poems; and when Mr Swinburne sings such an exquisite measure such as this, called "Itylus" – in which the sad old story relives in pulse and passion of music – we forget the heavy reek and mire through which we have been dragged. (Hyder TCH 38)

"Itylus", it would appear, is the epitome of all innocent delight. But this "lyrical sweetness" has a very disturbing origin: a woman has been raped and mutilated, and her sister has murdered her own child and fed his flesh to her husband for revenge. How can the poem which recounts such horror bring delight? Philomela asks this very question of her sister: "How can thine heart be full of the spring / What hast thou found in the spring to follow? What hast thou found in thy heart to sing?" This is horror that cannot be simply airbrushed out, dismissed as "a sad old story" in the face of lyric virtuosity. This is more disturbing than the "pulse and passion" found in carnival, this is more threatening than carnival, since it draws from the Greek and must be read in terms of Bacchanal whose dark side requires the juxtaposition of the beautiful with the grotesque, an admission that the rape of Philomela is at the root of the plaintive beauty of the poem. "Itylus" returns carnival to its Greek roots, to the dark areas of myth that are intimately associated with the aberrant sexuality of the old world, where the female presence, whether of goddess or woman, has a terrifying potency: Philomela's abuse at the hands of Tereus marked the end of female passivity. Afterwards the mutilated woman became an active agent: she produced "the woven web that was plain to follow" and had it conveyed to her sister, whereupon Procne took over the reins of power from her sister, in order to engineer the killing of her son and the serving of his flesh to his father; the two women perform the function of maenads: Procne becomes a sister of Agave who returns from the mountains carrying the head of the son she has murdered, and who cries delightedly: "Today was a splendid hunt / Come now and join in the feast" (*Bacchae* 219). Philomela notes the same joyous indifference in her sister: "Thy

heart is light as a leaf of a tree.” Like Agave, she too has been responsible for the tearing apart of the body of her son, the “wrenching” innate to Bacchanal; through her lyrical song she utters “the scream of horror at the moment of supreme joy” (Nietzsche 20)..

With carnival taken back to the realm of Bacchanal, all boundaries are now broken and merged: the action of Procne in killing her own child removes her from the sphere of the womanly and takes her into an area of violence associated with the male, but male spheres are equally dissolved since “the feast of Daulis” has emasculated the male, destroying the patriarchy of kingship, since Tereus has no son to succeed him, and he will even lose his own humanity.<sup>27</sup> Boundaries between pain and pleasure are lost since the birds’ song gives delight, but it draws from suffering. Life and death cease to occupy separate spheres; everything is subject to nihilism as all is viewed as equally memorable or forgettable. Yet, in spite of this, the Sapphic Komos of “Itylus” offers an inescapably enticing world: “Clothed with the light of the night on the dew.” In his castigation of Swinburne and his verse, Baynes speaks of: “stimulating fumes, steaming incense, fragrant oils, bruised seeds and gums, smelling of ‘all the sunburnt south’”(91; emphasis added). In the poem Philomela asks, “Why will thou fly after spring to the south?” She answers her own question: “the soft south whither thy heart is set.” The answer could well describe the critic’s own desires. The poem is a Bacchanalian ecstasy of lyric, celebrating rape, incest, mutilation and infanticide, and the consumption of a child’s flesh by the father in “the feast of Daulis”. Thus “the most revoltingly gruesome and barbarous” must be celebrated along with the beauty and lyric sweetness, for all of this belongs to the sublimity of verse of which Sappho is the signifier.

“Itylus” is a poem where a Bacchanalian conflation of one state with another is enabled by Sappho’s lability: operating through her nightingale form, the juxtaposition of her tropes, and

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<sup>27</sup> Tereus is turned into a bird, a hoopoe. The OED describes the hoopoe as “a salmon-pink bird with black and white wings and tail, a large erectile crest, and a long decurved tail.” It is as if the inappropriate use of Tereus’ penis (in raping Philomela) has reduced it to a mass of feathers which is put on show as a kind of parody of itself - on top of his head, a symbolic replacement of his previous kingly headgear, his crown. – a particularly Rabelaisian conceit.

the echoing of her lilting lyrical power, she creates a celebration, her own Komos.<sup>28</sup> However, her labile presence is not confined to the poem, she enables a further slippage: one between lyric and life, since Sappho is equally present on the page and within the mind. Now in her nightingale form, she could perch herself on the opened page of Poems and Ballads:1 and proclaim her presence, and look enquiringly into the mind of the reader and offer an equivalence between two worlds: the Thracian world of Itylus, and the world of the reader, since England in the 1860s was both subject to the same erosion of boundaries: the traditionally separate spheres of masculinity and the feminine were in the process of redefinition, while geological discoveries challenged received ideas of historicity; and with Darwinism, even the distinction between animal and human was as troublingly uncertain as that between human and bird in “Itylus”.<sup>29</sup> The song of the birds explores the dark areas: the sea gulfs hollow” and “the place of the slaying of Itylus”, a world where traditional mores have been destroyed and where, as Arnold claims: “the mind is divided against itself” (“Preface” 694). Sappho has merged the contemporary world into that of Thrace, celebrating the joys and horrors of both in a state of lyrical Komos. But above all, in “Itylus” she has proclaimed, in the throb of carnival, the madness of Bacchanal, the enduring power of the libido, the life-force, as she fed “the heart of the night with fire.”

Reynolds comments, “Sappho is not a name, much less a person. It is rather, a space, a space for filling in the gaps, joining up the dots, making something out of nothing” (2). But Swinburne’s Sappho was more than an empty space: the space throbbed, ached and vibrated, and became “a lyre of many faultless agonies”, whose voice spoke of the readers own fears and desires. In the poem “shedding... [her] song, upon height, upon hollow, “clothed with the light of the night on the dew”, Sappho expressed the uncomplicated joyous effusion of libido in “the spring’s guest-chamber”, while “the grief of the old time”, the “molten ember of the heart”, “the space where “the waves have met”, “the sea gulf’s hollow”, “the place of the slaying of Itylus” speak of the mind’s darkness, the pull of thanatos in its uneasy yoking with eros.

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<sup>28</sup> Lafourcade points out that there is a reference to the nightingale’s lability in “The Odyssey”. Here the attribute of the nightingale that Penelope uses for the purpose of the simile is not the pathos of her song, but its labile quality, which becomes for Penelope a symbol of the conflicting nature of her emotions(LJ2:449).

<sup>29</sup> Robin Gilmour points to this confusion and the desire to see a parallel in the Ancient World (20).

“Itylus” is a paradigm for Poems and Ballads:1; it acts an exemplum of Sapphic carnival, Komos and Bacchanal, a dark musical that celebrates libido as a form of female power through the beauty of lyric. When Philomela bids her sister “Take flight and find the sun”, she might well be regarded as addressing the readers, enticing them to free themselves from the constraints of convention, and celebrate their libido in all its forms in the unboundaried ambience of Sapphic Bacchanal: “Clothed with the light of the night on the dew / Sing while the hours and the wild birds follow.” The editor of the Albany Journal unwittingly commits himself to the carnival: “Coarse animalism, draped with the most seductive hues of art and romance. We will not analyse the poems; we will not even pretend to give reasons upon which our opinion is based” (A Song of Italy; advertising page 1). Komos has no time for analysis or opinion, but is concerned only with the “seductive hues” of the emerging libido.

### **Poet and Muse: a live performance**

Poems and Ballads:1 offered the possibilities of Komos. It was a performance directed by Sappho, but Swinburne had produced it, and when he was called on stage to face its reception, he was found to epitomise the very threat of carnival itself. On the one hand, as an aristocrat and gentleman and an acclaimed poet and critic, he epitomised all that was most admirable in contemporary society, the delightful side of life’s carnival. On the other hand, with his disproportionately large head, flaming red hair, tiny body and “his peculiar nervous twitching resembling St Vitus’ dance” (Henderson 54), he offered himself as an embodiment of the Grotesque. As in carnival, he appeared to have crossed gender and become a kind of hermaphrodite: “long-ringletted, flippant-lipped, down-cheeked, amorous-lidded”, as Buchanan would describe him (Hyder TCH 31). He possessed a disconcerting ability in moving between sleeping and waking, and even in crossing between the borders of life and death.<sup>30</sup> “With a kind of fairy look” (Gosse P&S 284), he was hardly human at all, more a bird, both in his lyrical

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<sup>30</sup> For his movement between life and death see Gosse: “...he would suddenly fall unconscious... but his general recovery after these fits was magical” (ACS 99). For his sleep-walking: “In the streets he had the movements of a somnambulist, and often I have seen him passing like a ghost across the traffic at Holborn” (P&S 11).

virtuosity and in his appearance.<sup>31</sup> As his own verse had blurred the distinctions between public and private, between the acknowledged and the forbidden, so too Swinburne offered himself as a living paradigm of the carnivalesque; and in imitating Sappho and her constructs within his life, as well as in his verse, he revealed himself as an actual signifier of the many sides of Sapphic Komos.

There would be a remarkable further manifestation of Swinburne and Sappho, offering a merging of Komos and daily life, and providing a public re-enactment of the intercourse between poet and muse, and the effect on its audience. In 1867 a photograph was widely circulated: it showed the small figure of Swinburne with the dominant female presence of Adah Menken, the circus rider towering over him.<sup>32</sup> While Swinburne appeared to perform the part of a man overwhelmed by a manifestation of his own libido, Menken visually performed the role of Sappho since she acted as both surrogate muse and mistress (*and* Gordon döppelgänger). Menken gave the impotent Swinburne the status of sexual identity, just as Sappho had done, and, like Sappho, she too wrote verse and provided inspiration for Swinburne's own. But she was also responsible for physically enacting the poetics of Poems and Ballads:1 since, again, like Sappho, she did not belong to Swinburne alone, like the Sapphic maenad on the kratyr, she was the centre of the male gaze, a sexualised muse who had caught the public imagination.<sup>33</sup> When Menken performed on horseback, she performed as a Sapphic maenad both actually, and

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<sup>31</sup> Swinburne's "sea mew persona" was described in Chapter 1, but Gosse's comparison of Swinburne to the hoopoe is interesting since it reminds us of the emasculated King Tereus: "...every now and then, without breaking off talking or bending his body, he hopped on to this sofa, and presently hopped down again, so that I was reminded of some orange crested bird – a hoopoe perhaps – hopping from perch to perch in a cage" (ACS 200-1).

<sup>32</sup> See Henderson: "...the pair were photographed together – a massive and distinctly middle-aged Dolores sitting down and gazing up into the little poet's face." She is said to have returned the £10 provided for her by Rossetti to work on Swinburne's "problem", but returned the note saying "she hadn't been able to get him up to the scratch" (131).

<sup>33</sup> Yatromanolakis comments on depictions of Sappho on 4<sup>th</sup> century Greek vases: "What these pictorial associations eventually achieve is an activation of cultural *vraisemblance* contributing to the naturalisation of the figure of Sappho in the symposiastic and komastic spaces of male self-defining and reflective gatherings." He adds wryly, "The socio-political dimensions of this kind of *vraisemblance* are related to a mythopractical negotiation of what might constitute lesbian female companionship in the male Athenian imagery of the early classical period. Time stands still" (164).

on the imagination.<sup>34</sup> She had the same mesmerising effect on her audience as Sappho had upon Swinburne, and as Poems and Ballads: 1 had on its readers as like Buchanan, they gawped as: “the Bacchanal screams, the sterile Dolores sweats.” And Adah Menken’s middle name actually was Dolores! Menken was a living signifier of the lability of the Sapphic muse who, freed from her possession of Swinburne, might just as easily possess the mind of the readers and entice them too, to join in her terrifying Komos.

In Poems and Ballads:1 Swinburne had initiated a bacchanal that reflected his Sapphic possession, but it was more than a lyrical expression of his own diverted libido, it would reveal a powerful multiple Sapphic presence already known to his readers, although they might be loath to publicly acknowledge those aspects that were of great and secret importance to them; but the lyrical power of the komos demanded from its readers an open celebration of the libido, of fracture, of aberrance and of lability, and in return, it offered them glimpses of the sublime as it set them “to dance with the Muses and Graces” (Fragment 208), not on Mount Helicon, although the lyric had emanated from a Greek source, but in a “twilight where virtues are vices”, “Where pain melted in tears and was pleasure, / Death tingled with blood and was life” (“Dolores”).

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<sup>34</sup> Menken appeared at Astley’s in Horseferry Road in Mazeppa, strapped to a horse and the illusion was created that she was naked. The performance and contemporary reaction to it is discussed by Wolf Mankowitz (128-140). He includes a verse review from Punch (1864) which shows a reaction similar to Pentheus’ to the maenads:

Here’s half the town – if bills be true-  
To Astleys nightly thronging,  
To see ‘the Menken’ throw aside  
All to her sex belonging,  
Stripping off a woman’s modesty,  
With woman’s outward trappings –  
A bare-backed jade on bare-backed steed,  
In Carlich’s old strappings (135-136)



## CONCLUSION

In my first chapter I adapted a line from “Two Gentlemen of Verona” and I asked: “Who is Sappho, what is she?” and I applied it to the reception of Sappho in the nineteenth century. We saw that like Sylvia, she represented a vast number of constructs: she was enigmatic and labile, she was also, if not fair, certainly “holy... and wise”, she was admired and intimately connected with sexuality, not through Cupid, but through his mother Aphrodite. Like Sylvia “who excels each mortal thing / Upon the dull earth dwelling”, she was sublime and embellished the mundane: through her lyrical reputation she too merited the laurel crown: “To her let us garlands bring” would have been the cry of many a scholar or poet.<sup>35</sup> Like Sylvia, her claims on the public imagination were manifold. In commenting on Shakespeare’s play, Swinburne utilises the floral reference and claims: “...the special graces and peculiar glories of each [play] that went before are gathered together as of one garland ‘of every hue and every scent’” (A Study of Shakespeare 49). This comment might well be applied to the effect of Sappho in Poems and Ballads: 1 since she too has constructs “of every hue and every scent”, and they have been gathered together within the volume: rose leaves and poppies have been garnered from horti

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35

Who is Silvia? What is she?  
That all our swains commend her:  
Holy fair and wise is she;  
The heavens such grace did lend her,  
That she might admired be.  
Is she kind or is she fair?  
For beauty lives with kindness;  
Love doth to her eyes repair  
To help him in his blindness;  
And being help'd inhabits there.  
Then to Silvia let us sing,  
That Silvia is excelling;  
She excels each mortal thing  
Upon the dull earth dwelling;  
To her let us garlands bring.

conclusi, from lovers' orchards, from the gardens of Proserpine and Priapus, from places of "wind and flowers", to form an unconventional bouquet, a fitting tribute for the director and star of The Sappho Show. But this is no ordinary bouquet: it contains "mysterious flowers", "double blossoms of two fruitless flowers", "sterile growths", "venomous flowers", blossoms on which the "blood lies in traces", "blown buds of barren flowers", "bruised blossoms"; the carnivorous sundew; roses that prick and "touch thee in the throat", and as a special tribute to Sappho, "lilies and languor of the Lesbian air." This is an eclectic selection of flowers picked by Swinburne for Sappho, but the bouquet does not remain as a personal tribute: "the roses, awful roses of holy blossom" are "scattered", and they are scattered before an audience who will be both enticed by the scent and alarmed by the thorns.

In my thesis I have been anxious to study these Sapphic flowers, to examine the nature of their colour, scent and more sinister properties, and to describe the seductive scent of the Sapphic bouquet both for Swinburne and for his readers. However, the purpose of this thesis has been more than to trace an elusive Sapphic fragrance, no matter how enticing. I have argued for a distinctive Sapphic possession that embraced Swinburne and inspired and enabled Poems and Ballads:1; but I have also taken the concept further and argued that this possessive influence was extended over his audience, and that it was this Sapphic presence which made Swinburne's poetics recognizable, shocking and enticing. Furthermore the Sapphic bouquet had an intoxicating scent and her soup contained hallucinatory qualities which enabled a Sapphic Bacchanal, a Komos which blurred the boundaries between lyric and life.

The thesis has fallen into two parts: firstly I have striven to demonstrate a process of Sapphic possession and its effects on Swinburne as he composed Poems and Ballads: 1, and secondly, I have explored its effects on his verse and on its reception by his audience.

I started by looking at Sapphic reception in the 1860s in order to view the wide range of constructs and to identify those that were most prevalent and significant. Next, drawing from biography I identified the factors which made Sappho particularly attractive to Swinburne, and I delineated a process by which he was drawn to her by a feeling of empathy experienced from his

earliest years, but also through attraction to her sublimity, towards which he could only strive; and thirdly, I showed how he used her as a substitute muse, both in the sense of the beloved and as the guiding source of inspiration. I argued that Swinburne was unable, through impotence to enjoy sexual fulfillment, but that his unsatisfied libido became associated with Sappho, and that he came to regard her as an alternative mistress and muse. I demonstrated that this was a process that resulted in Swinburne's possession by Sappho and which manifested itself through Sappho's overriding presence in the Poems and Ballads:1, and I showed how her possession was refracted through the verse and constituted, in effect, a substitute sexual sublime. However, I argued further this was no easy alternative, and that Swinburne's submission to Sappho resulted in a kind of death, a loss of masculinity and personality, and a life experienced second hand, as a virtual, rather than an actual, existence. The purpose of this study was twofold: firstly, I hoped to throw some light on how Swinburne's psychological state enabled his own particular brand of verse, and secondly, I needed to validate and establish Sappho's presence in the volume, so that it might be read specifically as a document of Sapphic possession when I came to the second part of my thesis: to examine the role of the poet and the effect of Sapphic possession on his verse, and on its audience. Below I indicate briefly my conclusions regarding these three areas. I begin with the poet.

I traced a process whereby the Sapphic muse gained dominance over Swinburne as poet as she had over him as a man, and in the process of possession, subjected him to a process of "castration", necrophilia and a form of "death", i.e. a reduction to being a Sapphic mouthpiece, a position, I argued, analogous to the Pythia or the Sibyl who speaks under coercion from a divine source. This would have a number of significant outcomes. The dominant power of the muse, places the balance of power on the irrational force of inspiration, rather than on the considered rational thinking of the poet; it is spontaneous, but also requires "tact", and it is the combination of this "tact" exemplified by Sappho, along with her inspiration or passion, which the poet must utilise in his striving towards a sublime, just as the Pythia inspired by Apollo, couched her divine utterance in polished hexameters. The poet's sources of inspiration, drawing as they did from the expression of the libido, asserted an association between sexuality and lyric, but since the libido was defined in Sapphic terms, the sources of inspiration were intimately connected not

only with the purely sexual, but would draw from the Sapphic concepts of the Aberrant, the Greek, the Labile and Fracture. Granting the onus of verse-making to the irrational force of the libido returned the poet to Plato's state of "enthumia", but although this form of madness had been traditionally seen as a respectable adjunct of the poet, it was now, through the dominant power of the feminine muse and the poet's resultant emasculation, allied to a feminised poet, and to forms of madness associated with the feminine: a brooding interiority, an hysteric state that might burst into violence at any time. The poet had become the antithesis of the Carlylean "Hero as Man of Letters"; he had become a feared figure who could no longer be categorised, but who was in the peculiar position of being a signifier and valoriser of female madness.

In his life Swinburne had substituted Sappho – a "dead" muse for a living one, and I demonstrated how, in Poems and Ballads: 1, he echoed this and subverted the well-established idea of the muse as a dying or dead beloved, and indulged in a form of necrophilia with her: this form of worship asserted an association between the putrid and the sublime, which would be developed later in writers associated with Aestheticism and Decadence.

The position of the poet as Pythia makes him into a channel of divine utterance, and as such, his position is a sacred one, but he is not a traditional priestly figure, but since has been effeminized by the power of the Sapphic muse, his is a feminine presence, and he must be regarded as *priestess* of an aberrant sublime. In this role, he is a performer, thus he does not belong to the tradition of the Millsian poet who is "overheard"; he is not the Shelleyan nightingale who sings to cheer his own shade, but his role is as a particular initiator, the prologue, as it were, of something more important than himself: a Sapphic performance: "The Sappho Show".

What sort of show would this be? What would be the nature of the verse on which it depended? Sappho, as we saw in the first chapter, was closely associated with the sublime and Poems and Ballads: 1 would refract her particular brand of the sublime. Particularly germane to the Sapphic sublime are the constructs of and Fracture, Aberrance and the Greek, and I argued that these constructs would form the bedrock of Swinburne's own sublime. Below I summarise what I mean. I start with Aberrance.

Since Poems and Ballads:1 is the result of intercourse between poet and muse, the turning of the libido whose intention is to produce an alternative sublime as potent as the sexual sublime, it would proclaim an intimate association between lyric and aberrant sexuality, and further, become a triumphant carnivalesque celebration of the libido's success. In this, it would draw from the dramatic monologue, but take the earlier ambiguous stance of poets such as Browning and Tennyson venturing into "the dangerous edge of things" much further, and through his necrophilic intercourse with his muse, Swinburne would assert the necessary presence of the putrid and grotesque. This is a sublime that celebrates the juxtaposition of the beautiful and the putrid.

The object of the verse has been to attain an alternative sublime, and the object of the reader in coming to the verse is to share in this sublime; however, since it cannot actually be attained, it must be glimpsed through broken images, and must be read, like Sappho's own, through fragments and without any sense of progression towards an organic whole; this assertion was frighteningly reflective of mid-Victorian society which was itself perceived in a state of fragmentation and disturbed comforting contemporary ideas of historicity. Fragmentation destroys any ideas of poetry's moral purpose, or of its being the means of purveying any kind of clear message; but neither was its credo "Art for Art's Sake" since the verse is the direct result of the muse's turning of the libido, honed by the poet's technical skill, rather than a conscious creation of the decorative.

The centrality of the Greek Sappho shows Swinburne reacting to contemporary discourse on the relative values of the Classical, opposed to the contemporary, as a "proper subject" for verse: Sappho's presence offers an alternative Hellenism, and denies what Arnold sees as the strength of Greek poetry: "unity and profoundness of moral impression" (668); and uses it instead, to explore the dark areas of myth and legend that are associated with the psyche. Swinburne's lyric reconfigured Apollo through the persona of Sappho, since the verse draws attention to particular aspects of myth and highlights the power of primeval female deities; it also draws particular attention to the life force expressed symbolised by Dionysus and expressed through

the figure of the maenad. The omnipresence of these terrifying feminine figures, who themselves come to be associated with Sappho, further asserts an overriding threatening female presence in lyric.

Sapphic constructs of the Sublime, Aberrance, Fracture and the Greek, all draw from, and play their part in contributing to the formation of a new poetics that results from Swinburne's Sapphic possession, but how would it be received? What was its effect on its audience? Naturally, such a provocative poetics drew strong contemporary condemnation since it challenged accepted norms; however, it seemed to me, that violent critical reaction went beyond a reasoned response to a new poetics: I argued that there was a particular agent responsible for this reaction, in the form of the presence of Sappho, who touched on something altogether larger and more fundamental than poetics, and who reached into the human mind and outed and privileged the most primeval fears and desires of the human condition. The final part of my thesis sought to explain how Swinburne's Sappho operated to achieve this.

In Poems and Ballads: 1 Sappho has been a labile presence as she has moved from construct to construct, from gender to gender, from eros to thanos, from beauty to the grotesque, from verse to woman, from woman to nightingale, from nightingale to muse, from muse to dominatrix, from dominatrix to mother goddess, and from Cybele to the deathly Persephone. From a sexual impulse within Swinburne's mind, she has evolved into a complete poem on the pages of Poems and Ballads: 1. However, this Lability was not confined to her role within a volume of verse; Sappho had been a familiar presence for more than two thousand years, and her lability had been operating for all that time on all who met her, in a myriad of different metamorphosing forms. She was, indeed, a rich broth served to suit individual taste. It was not only Swinburne who had been drawn to Sappho and her various constructs, the factors that had operated on him in the course of his possession by her, also operated on his peers for much the same reasons.

For the educated reader Sappho provided a familiar presence, she offered the sublime through her legend and her exquisite verse and as she had for Swinburne, she offered a vicarious source of sexual excitement; but for Swinburne she had also acted as a source of refuge from his own

deficiencies and anxieties. However, this last factor is what Poems and Ballads:1 denied its audience, since it served to out secret anxieties and hidden obsessions and confront its audience with them, and seek their acknowledgement, and even celebration.

Sappho had always performed, sometimes her performances were watched gravely, sometimes secretly, but seldom were they to be seen in an unexpurgated version. Using the concept of carnival I argued that Poems and Ballads:1 performed the function of a dizzying nineteenth century Sappho Show, a form of Bacchanal that refused a hiding place for anxieties or obsessions, but instead outed them, took them off the page, and offered a space between lyric and life, and asked for them to be acknowledged and celebrated in a mesmerizing Komos of her own devising.

This Sapphic Komos is as enticing as it is terrifying: it offers glimpses of a glittering sublime, but neither in verse or in life can the reader or reveller enjoy it, without acknowledging the grotesque and the putrid within its beauty, and recognizing that both belong to the latent libido within the individual. This, as in carnival, as in Bacchanal, as in Sapphic Komos, must be acknowledged and celebrated. This is the final effect of Sapphic possession. The audience is required to be part of the process of divine inspiration that has passed from Apollo to Sappho, and, by a tortuous process, from Sappho to Swinburne, and finally from Swinburne to his readers, so that now they too can feel her possessive touch and acknowledge their own desire for a sublime – of whatever nature.

In writing this thesis I have tried to yoke together Swinburne's "thirst of unbearable things" ("Anactoria") with Sappho's insistence on recognition: "someone, I say, will remember us in the future" (Fragment 147), through the concept of Sapphic possession; and I have used this complicated and fascinating conjuncture to explore Swinburne, both poet and man, and the nature of his verse. Finally, I have taken the concept further and endeavored to show how this Sapphic possession extended over the minds of the readers, and touched on the core of human existence to enable "that passionate and piteous pleasure which lies beyond the realm of tears" (CW 13:215).

## APPENDIX OF SAPPHIC FRAGMENTS

The following pages contain the original source material to which I have referred. I have taken it from the first volume of David Campbell's Greek Lyric. (London: Heinemann, 1982). I have chosen this version because it provides the original Greek, relevant scholarly reference, and a literal translation. I regard a close appreciation of the original as particularly important since Swinburne himself was an outstanding Classical scholar who required no translation, and would have been able to respond directly to the original Greek text amidst the plethora of translations, re-workings, associated texts and visual images available in the Nineteenth Century (as discussed in Chapter 1). It is probable that he was familiar with Theodor Bergk's standard Poetae Lyrici Graeci. (London: Williams and Northgate, 1853), and I have ensured that the fragments I have referred to were found within its pages.



1 D. H. *Comp.* 23 (vi 114ss. Usener-Radermacher) (+P. Oxy. 2288)

θήσω δὲ καὶ ταύτης παραδείγματα τῆς ἁρμονίας (sc. τῆς γλαφυρᾶς καὶ ἀνθηρᾶς συνθέσεως), ποιητῶν μὲν προχειρισάμενος Σαπφῶ, ῥητόρων δὲ Ἰσοκράτην. ἀρξομαι δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς μελοποιουῦ

ποικιλόθρον' ἀθανάτ' Ἀφρόδιτα,  
παῖ Δίος δολόπλοκε, λίσσομαί σε,  
μή μ' ἄσαισι μηδ' ὀνίαισι δάμνα,  
4 πότνια, θῦμον,

ἀλλὰ τιδ' ἔλθ', αἶ ποτα κατέρωτα  
τὰς ἔμας αὔδας αἰοῖσα πῆλοι  
ἔκλυες, πάτρος δὲ δόμον λίποισα  
8 χρύσιον ἦλθες

ἄρμ' ὑπαδευξαῖσα· κάλοι δέ σ' ἄγον  
ὠκεες στρουθοῖ περὶ γᾶς μελαίνας  
πύκνα δύνεντες πτέρ' ἀπ' ὠράνωϊθε-  
12 ρος διὰ μέσσω,

αἶψα δ' ἐξίκοντο· σὺ δ', ὦ μάκαιρα,  
μειδαιαῖσαι' ἀθανάτῳ προσώπῳ  
ἦρε' ὅττι δηῦτε πέπονθα κῶττι  
16 δηῦτε κάλημμι,

κῶττι μοι μάλιστα θέλω γένεσθαι  
μαινόλα θύμῳ· τίνα δηῦτε πείθω  
ἄψ σ' ἄγην ἐς Φᾶν φιλότατα; τίς σ', ὦ  
20 Ψάφ', ἀδικεῖ;

καὶ γὰρ αἶ φεύγει, ταχέως διώξει·  
αἶ δὲ δῶρα μὴ δέκετ', ἀλλὰ δώσει·  
αἶ δὲ μὴ φίλει, ταχέως φιλήσει·  
24 κωῦκ ἐθέλοισα.

ἔλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλέπαν δὲ λῦσον  
ἐκ μερίμναν, ὅσσα δέ μοι τέλεσσαι  
θῦμος ἱμέρρει, τέλεσον· σὺ δ' αὐτα  
28 σύμμαχος ἔσσο.

ταύτης τῆς λέξεως ἡ εὐπέια καὶ ἡ χάρις ἐν τῇ συνεχείᾳ καὶ  
λειότητι γέγονε τῶν ἁρμονιῶν. παρακίται γὰρ ἀλλήλοις τὰ  
ὀνόματα καὶ συνίφονται κατὰ τινὰς οἰκειότητος καὶ συζυγίας  
φυσικὰς τῶν γραμμάτων . . .

cf. D. H. epitom. 23 (vi 185ss. U.-R.), Heph. *Ench.* 14. 1,  
schol. A et Choerob. in Heph. *Ench.* 11 et 14 (pp. 43s., 146,  
244, 249ss. Consbr.), Hdn. 2. 948 Lentz, *Et. Gen.* p. 31 Calame,  
*Et. Guā.* 294. 37ss., Prisc. *Inst. Gr.* 1. 37, Hsch. K 1683, Ω 112,  
Athen. 9. 391f, Ap. Dysc. *Adv.* 1. 197 Schn.

1 -όθρον', -οφρον (vel sim.) codd. 19 .]ψ σ. ἄγην[ pap.  
μαιοσαγηρεσαν vel και- codd. Φᾶν Edmonds

1 Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *On Literary Composition*<sup>1</sup>

I shall give illustrations of this style (i.e. polished and exuberant composition), selecting Sappho among poets and Isocrates among orators, and I shall begin with the lyric poet:

Ornate-throned immortal Aphrodite, wile-weaving daughter of Zeus, I entreat you: do not overpower my heart, mistress, with ache and anguish, but come here, if ever in the past you heard my voice from afar and acquiesced and came, leaving your father's golden house, with chariot yoked: beautiful swift sparrows whirring fast-beating wings brought you above the dark earth down from heaven through the mid-air, and soon they arrived; and you, blessed one, with a smile on your immortal face asked what was the matter with me this time and why I was calling this time and what in my maddened heart I most wished to happen for myself: 'Whom am I to persuade this time to lead you back to her love? Who wrongs you, Sappho? If she runs away, soon she shall pursue; if she does not accept gifts, why, she shall give them instead; and if she does not love, soon she shall love even against her will.' Come to me now again and deliver me from oppressive anxieties; fulfil all that my heart longs to fulfil, and you yourself be my fellow-fighter.

The euphony and charm of this passage lie in the cohesion and smoothness of the joinery. Words are juxtaposed and interwoven according to certain natural affinities and groupings of the letters . . .

<sup>1</sup> A papyrus fragment of early 2nd c. A.D. gives scraps of verses 1-21. Since Hephæstion uses the poem to illustrate the Sapphic stanza, it was probably the first poem of Book 1.

2 Ostrakon Flor. (prim. ed. M. Norsa, *Ann. R. Scuola di Pisa* vi, 1937, 8 ss.)

δεῦρ' ἔκ Κρήτας ἐπ[ὶ τόνδ]ε ναῦον  
ἄγνον, ὅππ[α τοι] χάριεν μὲν ἄλσος  
μαλί[αν], βῶμοι δὲ τεθυμιάμε-  
4 νοι [λι]βανώτω·

ἐν δ' ὕδωρ ψυχρον κελάδει δι' ὕδων  
μαλίνων, βρόδοισι δὲ παῖς ὁ χῶρος  
ἔσκιαστ', αἰθυσσομένων δὲ φύλλων  
8 κῶμα κατέρρει·

ἐν δὲ λείμων ἰππόβοτος τέθαλεν  
ἠρίνοισιν ἀνθεσιν, αἰ δ' ἄηται  
μέλλιχα πνέουσιν [ ]  
12 [ ]

ἔνθα δὴ σὺ . . . . ἔλοισα Κύπρι  
χρυσίαισιν ἐν κυλίκεσσιν ἄβρωσ  
ὀμμεμείχμενον θαλίαισι νέκταρ  
16 οἰνοχόαισιν

1 δευρμμεκρητας . π[ ] . ναυγον ostr., interp. et suppl. Galiano, Lobel 2 suppl. Page 3 δεμθυμ- ostr. δὲ τεθυμ- Norsa 5 υσχων ostr. 9 Sitzler: καταριον ostr. καταρρεῖ Hermog. 10 Vogliano: τριτιγοριννοισ ostr. Page: αιαιηται ostr. 13 συσ . . μελοισα vel συσ . . ανελοισα ostr. 14 ακρωσ ostr. ἄβρωῖς Athen. 15 Gallavotti: εμμειχ- vel ἄμμειχ- ostr. συμμειγμενον Athen.

Hermog. *Id.* 2. 4 (p. 331 Rabe)

καὶ (sc. τῶν ἡδονῶν) τὰς μὲν οὐκ αἰσχροῦς ἔστιν ἀπλῶς ἐκφράζειν, οἷον κάλλος χωρίου καὶ φυτείας διαφόρους καὶ ρευμάτων ποικιλίας καὶ ὅσα τοιαῦτα· ταῦτα γὰρ καὶ τῇ ὄψει προσβάλλει ἡδονὴν δρώμενα καὶ τῇ ἀκοῇ, ὅτε ἐξαγγέλλει τις, ὡσπερ ἡ Σαπφῶ 'ἀμφὶ δὲ ὕδωρ ψυχρὸν κελάδει δι' ὕδων μαλίνων' καὶ αἰθυσσομένων δὲ φύλλων κῶμα καταρρεῖ' καὶ ὅσα πρὸ τούτων τε καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα εἴρηται.

Athen. 11. 463e (iii 9s. Kaibel)

καὶ κατὰ τὴν καλὴν οὖν Σαπφῶ·

ἔλθέ, Κύπρι,  
χρυσίαισιν ἐν κυλίκεσσιν ἄβρωσ  
συμμεμειγμένον θαλίαισι νέκταρ  
οἰνοχοῦσα

τούτοιαι τοῖς ἐταίροις ἐμοῖς γε καὶ σοῖς.

cf. Syrian. in Hermog. i 15 Rabe, Max. Plan. in Hermog. (v 534 Walz), *Et. Vindob.* 205 f. 109 (ap. Bergk<sup>1</sup>), *Anecd. Oxon.* iii 240 Cramer.

2 Potsherd of the 3rd c. B.C.

Hither<sup>1</sup> to me from Crete to this holy temple, where is your delightful grove of apple-trees, and altars smoking with incense; therein cold water babbles through apple-branches, and the whole place is shadowed by roses, and from the shimmering leaves the sleep of enchantment comes down; therein too a meadow, where horses graze, blossoms with spring flowers, and the winds blow gently . . . ; there, Cypris, take . . . and pour gracefully into golden cups nectar that is mingled with our festivities.

<sup>1</sup> The poem did not necessarily begin here: before δεῦρ' ἔκ the potsherd has ρανοθενκατιου[, 'coming down from heaven(?)', from the mountain top(?)].

Hermogenes, *Kinds of Style*

It is possible to describe in simple terms pleasures which are not base, the beauty of a place, for example, the variety of plant-life, the diversity of streams and so on. These things afford pleasure to the eye when seen and to the ear when spoken about. Compare Sappho: 'And round about cold water babbles through apple-branches' and 'from the shimmering leaves the sleep of enchantment flows down' and all that comes before and after this.

Athenaeus, *Scholars at Dinner*

And, as the lovely Sappho says, 'Come, Cypris, pouring gracefully into golden cups nectar that is mingled with our festivities' for these my friends and yours.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This phrase may also have been in S.'s poem.

31 'Longinus' *de subl.* 10. 1-3 (pp. 14s. Russell) + *P.S.I.* (v. fr. 213B)

οἷον ἡ Σαπφῶ τὰ συμβαίοντα ταῖς ἐρωτικαῖς μανίαις παθήματα ἐκ τῶν παρεπομένων καὶ ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας αὐτῆς ἐκάστοτε λαμβάνει. πού δὲ τὴν ἀρετὴν ἀποδείκνυται; ὅτι τὰ ἄκρα αὐτῶν καὶ ὑπερτεταμένα δεῖνῃ καὶ ἐκλέξει καὶ εἰς ἄλληλα συνδῆσαι

φαίνεται μοι κῆνος ἴσος θεοῖσιν  
ἔμμεν' ὦνηρ, ὅττις ἐναντίος τοι  
ἰσodάνει καὶ πλάσιον ἄδου φωνεί-  
4 σας ὑπακούει  
καὶ γελαισας ἰμέροεν, τό μ' ἦ μὴ  
καρδίαν ἐν στήθεσιν ἐπτόαισεν·  
ὡς γὰρ ἔς σ' ἴδω βρόχε', ὡς με φώναι-  
8 σ' οὐδ' ἐν ἔτ' εἰκει,

ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲν γλώσσά <μ'> ἔαγε, λέπτον  
δ' αὐτίκα χρωῦ πύρ ὑπαδεδρόμηκεν,  
ὀππάτεσσι δ' οὐδ' ἐν ὄρημμ', ἐπιρρόμ-  
12 βεισι δ' ἄκουαι,

καὶ δὲ μ' ἰδρῶς κακχέεται, τρόμος δὲ  
παῖσαν ἄγρει, χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας  
ἔμμι, τεθνάκην δ' ὀλίγω ἰπιδεύης  
16 φαίνομ' ἔμ' αὐτ[α].

ἀλλὰ πὰν τόλματον, ἐπεὶ †καὶ πένητα†

οὐ θαυμάζεις ὡς ὑπ(ὸ φῶ) αὐτὸ τὴν ψυχὴν τὸ σῶμα, τὰς ἀκοὰς τὴν γλῶσσαν, τὰς ὄψεις τὴν χροάν, πάνθ' ὡς ἀλλότρια διοιχόμενα ἐπιζητεῖ, καὶ καθ' ὑπεραντιώσεις ἅμα ψύχεται καίεται, ἀλογιστεῖ φρονεῖ † ἢ γὰρ † φοβεῖται † ἢ παρ' ὀλίγον τέθνηκεν ἵνα μὴ ἐν τι περὶ αὐτὴν πάθος φαίνεται, παθῶν δὲ σύνοδος; πάντα μὲν τοιαῦτα γίνεται περὶ τοὺς ἐρώντας, ἢ λήψις δ' ὡς ἔφην τῶν ἄκρων καὶ ἢ εἰς ταῦτ' συναίρεσις ἀπειργάσατο τὴν ἐξοχήν.

cf. Ap. Dysc. *Pron.* 75a, 106a (i 59, 82 Schn.), Plut. *de prof. virt.* 81d, *Demetr.* 38. 4, *Amat.* 763a, *Anecd. Oxon.* i 208 Cramer, *Anecd. Par.* i 399 Cramer

7 Edmonds, Tollius: ὡς γὰρ σῶμα βρόχεός cod. P φωνὰς cod. P, em. Danielsson 9 <μ'> Sitzler 11s. ἐπιβρόμεισι Bergk 13 Schneidewin: ἐκαδε μ' ἰδρῶς ψυχρὸς κακχέεται cod. P. ψυχρὸς del. Spengel ἰδρῶς ψυχρὸς ἔχει Page 15 Hermann: ἰπιδεύσην cod. P

34 Eust. *Il.* 729. 20

ἰστέον δὲ ὅτι ἐν τῷ 'φαινήν ἀμφὶ σελήνην' οὐ τὴν πληροφαιή νοητέον καὶ πληροσελήνην· ἐν αὐτῇ γὰρ ἀμαυρὰ εἰσι τὰ ἄστρα ὡς ὑπεραυγαζόμενα, καθὰ καὶ ἡ Σαπφῶ που φησὶν

ἄστερες μὲν ἀμφὶ κάλαν σελάνναν  
ἄψ ἀπυκρῦπτοισι φάεννον εἶδος  
ὀπποτα πλήθουσα μάλιστα λάμπη  
γᾶν

cf. *Anecd. Par.* iii 233 Cramer, Iulian. *Or.* 3. 109c (i 140 Hertlein)

4 <ἐπὶ παῖσαν> suppl. Holt Okes, Ahrens

ἀργυρία

Iulian. *Ep.* 194, 387a (p. 264 Bidez-Cumont)

Σαπφῶ . . . τὴν σελήνην ἀργυρέαν φησὶ καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τῶν ἄλλων ἀστέρων ἀποκρύπτειν τὴν ὄψιν.

31 'Longinus', *On sublimity*

Sappho, for example, always chooses the emotions associated with love's madness from the attendant circumstances and the real situation. Where does she display her excellence? In that she is adept at selecting and combining the most important and excessive concomitants:

He seems as fortunate as the gods to me, the man who sits opposite you and listens nearby to your sweet voice and lovely laughter. Truly that sets my heart trembling in my breast. For when I look at you for a moment, then it is no longer possible for me to speak; my tongue has snapped,<sup>1</sup> at once a subtle fire has stolen beneath my flesh, I see nothing with my eyes, my ears hum, sweat pours from me, a trembling seizes me all over, I am greener than grass, and it seems to me that I am little short of dying. But all can be endured, since . . . even a poor man . . .<sup>2</sup>

Are you not amazed how at one and the same moment she seeks out soul, body, hearing, tongue, sight, complexion as though they had all left her and were external, and how in contradiction she both freezes<sup>3</sup> and burns, is irrational and sane, is afraid and nearly dead, so that we observe in her not one single emotion but a concourse of emotions? All this of course happens to people in love; but, as I said, it is her selection of the most important details and her combination of them into a single whole that have produced the excellence of the poem.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lucr. 3. 155 *infringi linguam*. <sup>2</sup> Catullus 51 is an adaptation of S.'s poem: see G. Wills, *G.R.B.S.* 8 (1967) 167 ff. <sup>3</sup> 'Longinus' must have read ψυχρὸς, 'cold', in v. 13. <sup>4</sup> See also fr. 213B (Voigt).

34 Eustathius on *Iliad* 8. 555

Note that in the expression 'around the shining moon' one should not understand the light of a full moon; for then the stars are dim because they are outshone, as Sappho says somewhere:

The stars hide away their shining form around the lovely moon when in all her fullness she shines (over all) the earth.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> S. probably went on to speak of a girl who outshone her companions in beauty: see Julian's allusion and cf. 96. 6 ff.

Julian, *Letters*

Sappho . . . says the moon is silver and because of this conceals the other stars from view.

36 *Et. Gen.* (p. 31 Calame) = *Et. Mag.* 485. 41ss.

οἱ Αἰολεῖς . . . ποθέω ποθήω, οἶον  
καὶ ποθήω καὶ μάομαι

cf. *Et. Gud.* 294. 40 = *Anecd. Par.* iv 63 Cramer. Sa. ded.  
Tollius

38 *Ap. Dysc. Pron.* 127a (i 100 Schneider)

ἄμμε Αἰολεῖς

ὄπταις ἄμμε

Σαπφῶ πρώτῳ.

fort. ὄπταισ' (Lobel)

42 *Schol. Pind. Pyth.* 1. 10 (ii 10 Drachmann)

ἡ δὲ Σαπφῶ . . . ἐπὶ τῶν περιστερῶν

ταῖσι <δὲ> ψῦχος μὲν ἔγεντ' ὁ θυμός,  
πὰρ δ' ἴεσι τὰ πτέρᾱ

1 <δὲ> Neue ἔγεντ' ὁ Lobel: ἐγένετο codd.

49 *Heph. Ench.* 7. 7 (p. 23 Consbruch)

τῶν δὲ ἀκαταλήκτων (sc. δακτυλικῶν) τὸ μὲν πεντάμετρον  
καλεῖται Σαπφικὸν τεσσαρεσκαίδεκάσυλλαβον, ᾧ τὸ δεύτερον  
ὄλον Σαπφούς γέγραπται

ἡράμαν . . . πότα.

*Plut. Amat.* 751d (iv 343 Hubert)

καὶ τὴν οὐπω γάμων ἔχουσαν ὦραν ἡ Σαπφῶ προσαγορεύουσα  
φησιν ὅτι

σμικρὰ . . . κᾶχαρις.

ἡράμαν μὲν ἔγω σέθεν Ἄτθι πάλαι ποτὰ . . .  
σμίκρα μοι πάις ἔμμεν' ἐφαίνεο κᾶχαρις.

cf. scholl. A et B in *Heph.* (pp. 129s., 274 Consbr.), *Mar. Plot. Sacerd.* 3.3 (vi 512 Keil), *Arsen.* 28. 100 = *Apostol.* 8. 68b (ii 449 Leutsch-Schn.), *Terent. Maur.* 2154-5 (vi 390 Keil), *schol. Pind. Pyth.* 2. 78a (ii 44 Drachm.), *Max. Tyr.* 18. 9 (p. 231 Hob.), *Hsch. K* 1933

fr. eidem *carm. ded. Bergk* . 1 Bentley: ἄτοι, ἄτε codd.  
2 Bergk: ἔμμεναι, ἔτι codd., φαίνεο, φαίνεαι codd.

36 *Etymologicum Genuinum*

The Aeolic writers . . . use ποθήω for ποθέω, 'I long', e.g.  
and I long and yearn

38 *Apollonius Dyscolus, Pronouns*

Aeolic writers use ἄμμε, 'us':

you roast<sup>1</sup> us,

Sappho in Book 1.

<sup>1</sup> Or participle, 'roasting us'.

42 *Scholias on Pindar*

Sappho says of the pigeons

And their heart has grown cold, and they slacken  
their wings.

49 *Hephaestion, Handbook of Metres*

Among the acatalectic types (of Aeolic dactylic verse) the  
pentameter is called the Sapphic fourteen-syllable, in which  
the whole of Sappho Book 2 is written; cf.

I loved you, Atthis, once long ago.

*Plutarch, Dialogue on Love*

Addressing a girl who was still too young for marriage  
Sappho says,

You seemed to me a small, graceless child.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The version of Terentianus Maurus suggests that the lines  
are consecutive, however unlikely that may seem.

55 Stob. 3. 4. 12 (iii 221s. Wachsmuth–Hense) (περὶ ἀφροσύνης)

Σαπφούς πρὸς ἀπαιδευτον γυναῖκα:

κατθάγοισα δὲ κείσῃ οὐδὲ ποτα μναμοσύνα σέθεν  
ἔσσειτ' οὐδὲ πόθα εἰς ὕστερον· οὐ γὰρ πεδέχῃς  
βρόδων  
τῶν ἐκ Πιερίας, ἀλλ' ἀφάνης κὰν Ἄϊδα δόμῳ  
φουτάσῃς πεδ' ἀμαύρων νεκύων ἐκπεποταμένα.

cf. Plut. *coniug. praec.* 145f–146a (πρὸς τινα πλουσίαν), *quaest. conu.* 646ef (πρὸς τινα τῶν ἀμούσων καὶ ἀμαθῶν γυναικῶν), Clem. Alex. *Raed.* 2. 8. 72

Bucherer: οὐδέποκ' ὕ. codd.

81 Athen. 15. 674e (iii 491 Kaibel) (vv. 4–7) + P. Oxy. 1787 fr. 33 (vv. 1–5)

Σαπφῶ δ' ἀπλούστερον τὴν αἰτίαν ἀποδίδωσιν τοῦ στεφανοῦσθαι ἡμᾶς, λέγουσα τάδε:

]απύθεσ . [  
]χισταλ[  
]εμπ[

σὺ δὲ στεφάνοις, ὦ Δίκα, πέρθεσθ' ἐράτοις φό-  
βαισιν

5 ὄρπακας ἀνήτω συν<α>έρραισ' ἀπάλαιμι χέρσιν·  
εὐάνθεα ἴγὰρ πέλεται† καὶ Χάριτες μάκαιραι  
μᾶλλον ποτόρηγν, ἀστεφανώτοισι δ' ἀπυστρέφον-  
ται.

ὡς εὐανθέστερον γὰρ καὶ κεχαρισμένον μᾶλλον τοῖς θεοῖς παρα-  
γέλλει στεφανοῦσθαι τοὺς θύοντας.

1 ἀπύθεσ[αι Hunt 2 ὅτι τά]χιστα Diehl 4 Bentley:  
παρθεσθ cod. A ]ερθεσ[ pap. Fick: ἐράταις cod. A 5  
Ahrens: συνερραις cod. A Casaubon: ἀπαλλαγιση cod. A 6  
Wilamowitz: μακαιρα cod. A 7 Seidler: προτερην cod. A  
προφέρην Lobel

55 Stobaeus, *Anthology* (on folly)

Sappho to an uneducated woman <sup>1</sup>:

But when you die you will lie there, and afterwards there will never be any recollection of you or any longing for you since you have no share in the roses of Pieria <sup>2</sup>; unseen in the house of Hades also, flown from our midst, you will go to and fro among the shadowy corpses.

<sup>1</sup> Plutarch says the lines were addressed 'to a wealthy woman', elsewhere 'to an uncultured, ignorant woman'. See also fr. 147, 193. <sup>2</sup> In Macedonia; birthplace of the Muses.

81 Athenaeus, *Scholars at Dinner* + papyrus fragment

But Sappho expresses more simply the reason for our practice of wearing garlands when she says:

... reject ... (as quickly as possible) <sup>1</sup> ... and you, Dica, put lovely garlands around your locks, binding together stems of anise with your soft hands; for the blessed Graces look rather on what is adorned with flowers and turn away from the ungarlanded. <sup>2</sup>

She urges those offering sacrifice to garland themselves since what is more adorned with flowers is more pleasing to the gods.

<sup>1</sup> These isolated words are from the papyrus. <sup>2</sup> Text of last two lines corrupt. Cf. Alc. 362, 436.

τεθνάκην δ' ἀδόλως θέλω·  
2 ἄ με ψιδομένα κατελίμπανεν  
  
πόλλα καὶ τόδ' ἔειπέ [μοι·  
'ὦμι' ὡς δεῖνα πεπ[όνθ]αμεν,  
5 Ψάπφ', ἧ μάν σ' ἀέκοισ' ἀπυλιμπάνω·

τὰν δ' ἔγω τάδ' ἀμειβόμαν·  
'χαίρισ' ἔρχεο κάμεθεν  
8 μέμναισ', οἶσθα γὰρ ὡς σε πεδήπομεν·

αἰ δὲ μή, ἀλλά σ' ἔγω θέλω  
ᾄμναισαι [ . . . ] . [ . . . ] . . αἰ  
11 . . [                    ] καὶ κάλ' ἐπάσχομεν.

πό[λλοις γὰρ στεφάν]οις ἴων  
καὶ βρ[όδων κρο]κίων τ' ὕμοι  
14 κα . . [                    ] πᾶρ ἔμοι περεθήκαο,

καὶ πό[λλαις ὑπα]θύμιδας  
πλέκ[ταις ἀμφ' ἀ]πάλαι δέραι  
17 ἀνθέων ἔ[βαλες] πεποημμέναις,

καὶ πολλὰμι[                    ]. μύρωι  
βρενθείωι. [                    ] ρυ[ . . ]ν  
20 ἐξαλείψαο κα[ὶ βασ]ιληίωι,

καὶ στρώμ[αν ἐ]πὶ μολθάκαν  
ἀπάλαν πα . [                    ] . . . ων  
23 ἐξίης πόθο[ν                    ] . νίδων,

102 Heph. *Ench.* 10. 5 (p. 34 Consbruch)

ἔστι δὲ πυκνὸν (sc. ἐν τοῖς ἀντισπαστικοῖς τετραμέτροις καταληκ-  
τικοῖς) καὶ τὸ τὴν δευτέραν μόνην ἀντισπαστικὴν ἔχον, ᾧ μέτρον  
ἔγραψεν ἄσματα καὶ Σαπφῶ ἐπὶ τ(ελευτ)ῆς τοῦ ἑβδόμου·

γλύκηα μάτερ, οὔτοι δύναμαι κρέκην τὸν ἴστον  
πόθω δάμεισα παῖδος βραδίναν δι' Ἀφροδίταν.

cf. *Et. Gen.* (p. 32 Calame) = *Et. Gud.* 316. 35s. Sturz = *Et. Mag.* 505. 57s., Zonar. 1190 (κερκίς)

2 βραδίνω ci. Bergk

94 Same parchment

. . . and honestly I wish I were dead. She was leaving me with many tears and said this<sup>1</sup>: 'Oh what bad luck has been ours, Sappho; truly I leave you against my will.' I replied to her thus: 'Go and fare well and remember me, for you know how we cared for you. If not, why then I want to remind you . . . and the good times we had. You put on many wreaths of violets and roses and (crocuses?) together by my side, and round your tender neck you put many woven garlands made from flowers and . . . with much flowery perfume, fit for a queen, you anointed yourself . . . and on soft beds . . . you would satisfy your longing (for?) tender . . .

102 Hephaestion, *Handbook on Metres*

Common also is the antispastic tetrameter catalectic which has only its second unit antispastic,<sup>1</sup> a metre in which Sappho wrote songs at the end of (or 'in') her seventh book:

Truly, sweet mother, I cannot weave my web, for I am overcome with desire for a boy because of slender Aphrodite.

<sup>1</sup> The other units being iambic (υ-υ-/υ- υ/υ-υ-/υ-); in modern analysis, iambic + glyconic + bacchius, or anacreontic.

104(a) Demetr. *Eloc.* 141 (p. 33 Radermacher)

χαριεντίζεται δέ ποτε (ἢ Σαπφῶ) καὶ ἐξ ἀναφορᾶς ὡς ἐπὶ τοῦ Ἑσπερον

Ἔσπερε πάντα φέρων ὅσα φαίνολις ἔσκέδασ' αὔτως,  
†φέρεις ὄιν, φέρεις† αἶγα, φέρεις ἄπυ μάτερι παῖδα.

καὶ γὰρ ἐνταῦθα ἡ χάρις ἐστὶν ἐκ τῆς λέξεως τῆς φέρεις ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ἀναφερομένης.

cf. *Et. Gen.* (pp. 18, 27 Calame), *Et. Mag.* 174. 43s., 384. 1, *Et. Gud.* p. 538 Stef., pp. 254. 5, 446. 3s. Sturz, *Anecd. Oxon.* ii 444 Cramer, schol. Eur. *Orest.* 1260

1 φέρεις Demetr. cod. P 2 φέρεις οἶνον φέρεις αἶγα φέρεις μάτερι παῖδα cod. P φέρεις οἶον φέρεις οἶνον φέρεις αἶγα φέρεις ἄπυον μητέρι παῖδα *Et. Gen.* (p. 27C.) οἶν Manuzio οἶν Benti-voglio αἶγα φέρεις ἑπερόν τε Floyd ἄπυ Bergk

(b) Himer. *Or.* 46. 8 (p. 188 Colonna)

ἀστὴρ οἶμαι σύ τις ἑσπέριος,  
ἀστέρων πάντων ὁ κάλλιστος . . .

Σαπφούς τοῦτο δὴ τὸ <ἐς> Ἑσπερον ἄσμα.

cf. 47. 17 (p. 195 Col.)

105(a) Syrian. in Hermog. *Id.* 1. 1 (i 15 Rabe)

καὶ ὅσαι (ιδέαι) τὰ ταῖς αἰσθήσεων ἡδέα ἐκφράζουσιν, ὄψει, ἀκοῇ, ὀσφρήσει, γεύσει, ἀφῆ, ὡς . . . Σαπφῶ (fr. 2. 5-8) καὶ

οἶον τὸ γλυκύμαλον ἐρεύθεται ἄκρω ἐπ' ὕσδω,  
ἄκρον ἐπ' ἀκροτάτῳ, λελάθοντο δὲ μαλοδρόπης·  
οὐ μὰν ἐκλελάθοντ', ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐδύναντ' ἐπὶκεσθαι.

cf. schol. Theocr. 11. 39c (p. 245 Wendel), Longum 3. 33

(b) Himer. *Or.* 9. 16 (p. 82 Colonna)

Σαπφούς ἦν ἄρα μῆλιω μὲν εἰκάσαι τὴν κόρην . . . τὸν νυμφίον τε Ἀχιλλεὶ παρομοιωῶσαι καὶ εἰς ταῦτόν ἀγαγεῖν τῷ ἥρωι τὸν νεανίσκον ταῖς πράξεσι.

(c) Demetr. *Eloc.* 106 (p. 26 Radermacher)

τὸ δὲ ἐπιφώνημα καλούμενον ὀρίζοιτο μὲν ἂν τις λέξιν ἐπικοσμοῦσαν· ἐστὶ δὲ τὸ μεγαλοπρεπέστατον ἐν τοῖς λόγοις· τῆς γὰρ λέξεως ἢ μὲν ὑπηρετεῖ, ἢ δὲ ἐπικοσμεῖ. ὑπηρετεῖ μὲν ἢ τοιάδε· οἶαν . . . καταστείβοισι', ἐπικοσμεῖ δὲ τὸ ἐπιφερόμενον τὸ 'χάμαι . . . ἄνθος'. ἐπενήνεκται γὰρ τοῦτο τοῖς προλελεγμένοις κόσμος σαφῶς καὶ κάλλος.

οἶαν τὰν ὑάκινθον ἐν ὄρεισι ποίμενες ἄνδρες  
πόσσι καταστείβοισι, χάμαι δέ τε πόρφυρον  
ἄνθος . . .

Sa. ded. Bergk

104(a) Demetrius, *On Style*

Sometimes, also, Sappho makes charming use of repetition as in the description of the Evening Star:

Hesperus, bringing everything that shining Dawn scattered, you bring the sheep, you bring the goat, you bring back the child to its mother.

Here the charm lies in the repetition of the word 'bring', always with the same reference (i.e. to Hesperus).

(b) Himerius, *Orations*

You are, I think, an evening star,  
the fairest of all the stars.

This song to Hesperus is Sappho's.

105(a) Syrianus on Hermogenes, *On Kinds of Style*

And such kinds of style as describe what gives pleasure to the senses, sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch as . . . Sappho (fr. 2. 5-8) and

As the sweet-apple reddens on the bough-top, on the top of the topmost bough; the apple-gatherers have forgotten it—no they have not forgotten it entirely, but they could not reach it.

(b) Himerius, *Orations*

It was Sappho who compared the girl to an apple . . . and likened the bridegroom to Achilles and put the young man on a par with the hero in his achievements.

(c) Demetrius, *On Style*

The so-called 'epiphoneme' might be defined as a phrase which adds ornamentation, and it is the most impressive feature in prose. Some phrases help the sense, others ornament it; one that helps the sense is 'Like the hyacinth . . . mountains'; what follows ornaments it: 'and on the ground . . . flower'. This addition to the foregoing words clearly adds ornament and beauty.

Like the hyacinth which shepherds tread underfoot in the mountains, and on the ground the purple flower . . .<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Attributed to Sappho by Bergk.

122 Athen. 12. 554b (iii 223 Kaibel)

φυσικὸν γὰρ δὴ τι τὸ τοὺς οἰομένους εἶναι καλοὺς καὶ ὠραίους ἀνθολογεῖν. ὅθεν αἱ τε περὶ τὴν Περσεφόνην ἀνθολογεῖν λέγονται καὶ Σαπφῶ φησὶν ἰδεῖν

ἄνθε' ἀμέργοισαν παῖδ' † ἄγαν † ἀπάλαν.

παῖδα τὰν Blomfield

125 Schol. Aristoph. *Thesm.* 401 (p. 267 Dübner)

νεωτέρων καὶ ἐρωτικῶν τὸ στεφανηπλοκεῖν· πρὸς τὸ ἔθος, ὅτι ἐστεφανηπλόκουν αἱ παλαιαί. Σαπφῶ·

† αὐταόρα † ἐστεφαναπλόκην

αὐτα δ' ὠράα Ahrens αὐτα|ὠράα στ- Treu αἰστεφαναπλόκουν  
cod. ἐστ- Seidler -απλόκην Ahrens

127 Heph. *Ench.* 15. 25 (p. 55 Consbruch)

καὶ τὸ ἐξ ἰθυφαλλικῶν δύο ἢ Σαπφῶ πεποίηκε·

δεῦρο δηῦτε Μοῦσαι χρύσιον λίποισαι . . .

cf. schol. A in Heph. 15 (p. 161 Consbr.)

128 Heph. *Ench.* 9.2 (p. 30 Consbruch)

τετράμετρα δὲ (sc. χοριαμβικά), ἃ καὶ συνεχέστερά ἐστιν, οἷα ταυτὶ τὰ Σαπφῶς·

δεῦτέ νυν ἄβραι Χάριτες καλλίκομοί τε Μοῦσαι

cf. schol. A et Choerob. in Heph. (pp. 139 app., 235 Consbr.),  
Atil. Fort. *Ars* 28 (vi 301 Keil)

129 Ap. Dysc. *Pron.* 83bc (i 66 Schneider)

ἐμέθεν πυκνῶς αἱ χρήσεις παρὰ Αἰολεῦσιν

(a) ἐμέθεν δ' ἔχρησθα λάθαν

(b) ἢ τιν' ἄλλον ἀνθρώπων ἐμέθεν φίλησθα

Sa. ded. La Croze (b) ἢ τιν' ἄλλον|<μᾶλλον> (i.e. stroph. Sapph.)  
Bergk ἢ τίνα μᾶλλον . . . ; Page

122 Athenaeus, *Scholars at Dinner*

For it is natural that those who think themselves beautiful and ripe should gather flowers. This is why Persephone and her companions are said to gather flowers, and Sappho says she saw

a tender girl picking flowers

125 Scholiast on Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusae*

It was young folk and people in love who wove garlands; with reference to the custom by which women of old used to wear garlands; cf. Sappho:

(I myself in my youth?) used to weave garlands.

127 Hephaestion, *Handbook on Metres*

Sappho has composed the line which contains two ithyphallics:

Hither again, Muses, leaving the golden (house of your father, Zeus?)

128 Hephaestion, *Handbook on Metres*

. . . and the choriambic tetrameter,<sup>1</sup> which is found in longer sequences, as in Sappho's lines which begin:

Hither now, tender Graces and lovely-haired Muses.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Heph. notes that the line ends in an amphibrach or (as here) a bacchius. <sup>2</sup> Cf. 103. 8.

129 Apollonius Dyscolus, *Pronouns*

ἐμέθεν (' of me ') is frequently used by the Aeolic poets:

(a) and you have forgotten me

(b) or you love some other (more?) than me



130 Heph. *Ench.* 7. 7 (p. 23 Consbruch)

τὸ δὲ τετράμετρον (sc. Αἰολικὸν δακτυλικόν) ἀκατάληκτόν ἐστι τοιοῦτον

Ἔρος δηῦτέ μ' ὁ λυσιμέλης δόνει,  
γλυκύπικρον ἀμάχανον ὄρπετον

sequitur fr. 131. Cf. schol. B in Heph. 9 (p. 274 Consbr.),  
Max. Tyr. 18.9 (v. fr. 172)

1 Seidler: δαῦτε codd.

131 Heph. *Ench.* 7. 7 (v. ad fr. 130)

Ἄτθι, σοὶ δ' ἔμεθεν μὲν ἀπήχθετο  
φροντίσδην, ἐπὶ δ' Ἀνδρομέδαν πότῃ

cf. schol. B in Heph. 9 (p. 274 Consbr.)

2 Bentley: φροντὶς δ' ἦν codd. Voigt: πότῃ, πότε codd.

132 Heph. *Ench.* 15. 18 (p. 53s. Consbruch)

ἄλλο ἀσύναρτητον ὁμοίως κατὰ τὴν πρώτην ἀντιπάθειαν, ἐκ τροχαϊκοῦ διμέτρου ἀκατάληκτου καὶ ἰαμβικοῦ ἐφθήμερου, ὅπερ εἴαν παραλλάξῃ τὴν τομὴν, γίνεται τροχαϊκὸν προκαταληκτικόν

ἔστι μοι κάλα πάϊς χρυσοῖσιν ἀνθέμοισιν  
ἐμφέρῃ <ν> ἔχοισα μὲρ φαν Κλείς ἀγαπάτα,  
ἀντὶ τᾶς ἐγῶνδὲ Λυδίαν παῖσαν οὐδ' ἐράνναν . . .

τούτων δὲ τὸ μὲν δεύτερον δῆλόν ἐστιν ἀπὸ τῆς τομῆς ὅτι οὕτως σύγκειται ὡς προεῖρηται, ἐκ τοῦ τροχαϊκοῦ διμέτρου ἀκατάληκτου καὶ τοῦ ἐφθήμερου ἰαμβικοῦ, τὸ δὲ πρῶτον, διὰ τὸ πρὸ συλλαβῆς ἔχειν τὴν τομὴν, ἐγένετο προκαταληκτικόν, ἐκ τροχαϊκοῦ ἐφθήμερου, ἔστι μοι κάλα πάϊς, καὶ διμέτρου ἀκατάληκτου τοῦ χρυσοῖσιν ἀνθέμοισιν. τὸ δὲ τρίτον ἐξ ὑπερκατάληκτου, ἀντὶ τᾶς ἐγῶνδὲ Λυδίαν καὶ βραχυκατάληκτου, παῖσαν οὐδ' ἐράνναν.

cf. schol. A in Heph. 15 (p. 159 Consbr.)

2 post Κλείς fort. deest syllaba; ἀγαπ- = ἀ ἀγαπ-

134 Heph. *Ench.* 12.4 (p. 39 Consbruch)

τῶν δὲ τριμέτρων (sc. ἰωνικῶν τῶν ἀπ' ἐλάσσονος) τὸ μὲν ἀκατάληκτον

ζά <τ'> ἐλεξάμαν ὄναρ, Κυπρογένεια,

παρὰ τῇ Σαπφοί.

cf. schol. A in Heph. 12 (p. 148 Consbr.)

Maas: ζαελεξ- cod. A προσελεξ -codd. HI schol. fort. -γενίη:  
-γέννα, -γενεία codd.

130 Hephæstion, *Handbook on Metres*

The Aeolic dactylic tetrameter acatalectic is as follows:

Once again limb-loosening Love makes me tremble,  
the bitter-sweet, irresistible creature.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps followed immediately by 131.

131 Hephæstion, *Handbook on Metres*

(But?), Atthis, the thought of me has grown hateful  
to you, and you fly off to Andromeda.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See on 130.

132 Hephæstion, *Handbook on Metres*

Similarly there is another 'asynartete' or 'unconnected' metre of the first type of opposition (i.e. trochaic clashing with iambic), composed of a trochaic dimeter acatalectic and an iambic 3½-foot length; if the caesura is transposed, the line becomes a procatalectic trochaic<sup>1</sup>:

I have a beautiful child who looks like golden  
flowers, my darling Cleis, for whom I would not (take)  
all Lydia or lovely<sup>2</sup> . . .

The second line is shown clearly by the caesura to be composed, as I have said, of the trochaic dimeter acatalectic and the iambic 3½-foot length; the first line thanks to its early caesura has become procatalectic, formed from a trochaic 3½-foot length (ἔστι μοι κάλα πάϊς) and an acatalectic (trochaic) dimeter (χρυσόισιν ἀνθέμοισιν); line 3 is composed of a hypercatalectic (trochaic dimeter)<sup>3</sup> (ἀντὶ τᾶς ἐγῶνδὲ Λυδίαν) and a brachycatalectic (trochaic dimeter)<sup>4</sup> (παῖσαν οὐδ' ἐράνναν).

<sup>1</sup> I.e. with early catalexis as in v. 1 (tro. dim. cat. + tro. dim.); on the metrical problems of the fr. see Page, *S. & A.* 131 n. 4: our text of v. 2 does not suit Heph.'s analysis.  
<sup>2</sup> Perhaps 'lovely Lesbos'. <sup>3</sup> I.e. a dimeter with an extra final syllable. <sup>4</sup> I.e. a dimeter with two syllables suppressed.

134 Hephæstion, *Handbook on Metres*

Among ionic *a minore* trimeters an example of the acatalectic is Sappho's:

I talked with you in a dream, Cyprogeneia<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cyprus-born Aphrodite; text uncertain: perhaps 'I talked in a dream with C.'; beginning of poem.

135 Heph. *Ench.* 12.2 (p. 37s. Consbruch)

καὶ ὅλα μὲν οὖν ἄσματα γέγραπται ἰωνικά, ὡσπερ Ἀλκμᾶνι  
(fr. 46 *P. M. G.*), Σαπφοῦ δέ·

τί με Πανδίωνις, Ὡριρανα, χελιδῶν . . . ;

Ἀλκαίῳ δὲ πολλά (v. Alc. 10B)

cf. Hsch. Ω 302 ὠράνα· χελιδόνων ὀροφή

136 Schol. Soph. *El.* 149 (p. 110 Papageorg.)

τὸ δὲ ἑὸς ἄγγελος, ὅτι τὸ ἔαρ σημαίνει (ἡ ἀηδῶν), . . . καὶ  
Σαπφῶ·

ἦρος ἄγγελος ἱμερόφωνος ἀηδῶν

cf. *Sud.* A 651

144 Hdn. π. κλίσι. ὄνομ. (ap. Aldi *Thes. Cornucop.* 268<sup>v</sup>: v.  
Choerob. ii. lxx 43s. Hilgard) = cod. Voss. gr. 20 (Reitzen-  
stein *Gesch. Et.* 367)

. . . οἶον ἡ Σαπφῶ τῆς Σαπφῶς καὶ ἡ Λητώ τῆς Λητῶς· καὶ  
δηλοῦσιν αἱ χρήσεις οὕτως ἔχουσαι· (*P. M. G.* 979) καὶ παρ' αὐτῆ  
τῆ Σαπφοῦ·

146 Trypho *Trop.* 25 (*Rhet. Gr.* viii 760 Walz)

παροιμία . . . ὡς παρὰ Σαπφοῦ·

μήτε μοι μέλι μήτε μέλισσα

cf. Diogen. 6. 58 (i 279 Leutsch-Schneidewin) . . . ἐπὶ τῶν μὴ  
βουλομένων παθεῖν τι ἀγαθὸν μετὰ ἀπευκτοῦ, *ibid.* i 368, ii 39, 189,  
527, Arsen. p. 354 Walz

147 Dio Chrys. 37. 47 (ii 29 Arnim)

μνάσεσθαί τινά φαιμι † καὶ ἕτερον † ἀμμέων.

πάνν γὰρ καλῶς εἶπεν ἡ Σαπφῶ . . . λάθα μὲν γὰρ ἦδη τινὰς  
καὶ ἐτέρους ἐσφηλε καὶ ἐψεύσατο, γνῶμη δ' ἀνδρῶν ἀγαθῶν οὐδένα,  
ἢ κατ' ἀνδρα μοι ὀρθὸς ἐστηκας.

Casaubon: -σασθαι codd. καὶ ἄψερον? Lobel καὶ ὕστερον Volger  
φαιμ' ἔτι κάτερον Page

135 Hephaestion, *Handbook on Metres*

Whole songs were written in ionics, e.g. by Alcman (fr. 46)  
and Sappho:

Why, Irana, does Pandion's daughter, the swal-  
low,<sup>1</sup> (wake?) me?

and many by Alcaeus (see fr. 10B).

<sup>1</sup> Procne, daughter of Pandion, king of Athens, was turned into  
a swallow.

136 Scholiast on Sophocles

Sophocles uses the expression 'messenger of Zeus' of the  
nightingale because it signals the coming of spring; . . . cf.  
Sappho:

the messenger of spring, the lovely-voiced nightin-  
gale

144 Herodian, *On the Declension of Nouns*

. . . For example, Σαπφῶ, 'Sappho', with genitive Σαπφῶς  
and Λητώ, 'Leto', with genitive Λητῶς, as in (*P. M. G.* 979)  
and in Sappho herself:

146 Tryphon, *Figures of Speech*

Proverb . . . as in Sappho:

I want neither the honey nor the bee.

Diogenian, *Proverbs*

'I want etc.' is used of those who are not willing to take the  
bad with the good.

147 Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses*

Someone, I say, will remember us in the future,

as Sappho so beautifully puts it . . . For<sup>1</sup> before now for-  
getfulness has tripped and cheated others, but good judgement  
has not cheated any man of worth, and because of this you  
stand upright for me like a man.

<sup>1</sup> This sentence or part of it may be a further allusion to S.'s  
poem; cf. 32, 55.

149 Ap. Dysc. *Pron.* 126b (i 99 Schneider)

καὶ σὺν τῷ 'α' λέγεται (sc. σφι) παρ' Αἰολεῦσιν  
ὄτα πάννουχος ἄσφι κατάγρει

Σαπφώ.

150 Max. Tyr. 18. 9 (p. 232 Hobein)

ἀναίθεται (ὁ Σωκράτης) τῇ Ξανθίππῃ ὀδυρομένη ὅτε ἀπέθνησκεν,  
ἢ δὲ (sc. Σαπφῶ) τῇ θυγατρὶ·

οὐ γὰρ θέμις ἐν μοισοπόλων † οἰκία †  
θρήνον ἔμμεν· οὐ κ' ἄμμι πρέποι τάδε.

1 δόμῳ Hartung 2 τάδε πρέποι Lobel

151 *Et Gen.* (p. 19 Calame) = *Et. Mag.* 117. 14ss.

ἄωρος ἦτοι κατὰ πλεονασμὸν τοῦ ὄρος μὴδὲν πλέον σημαίνοντος·  
ὄρος γὰρ ὁ ὕπνος. Καλλίμαχος (fr. 177. 28 Pf.) καὶ Σαπφώ, οἶον·

ὀφθαλμοῖς δὲ μέλαις νύκτος ἄωρος . . .

cf. Hsch. A 5683 ἄωρος· ἄπνος (!) Μηθυμναῖοι.

νωκτός, νύκτα, χύτ' codd.

152 Schol. Ap. Rhod. 1. 727 (p. 61 Wendel)

ἐρευθήεσσα δὲ ἀντὶ τοῦ πυρρά, ὑπέρυθρος, καὶ ἔστι παρὰ τὸ  
Σαπφικόν·

παντοδάπαισι μεμειχμένα χροΐαισιν

154 Heph. *Ench.* 11. 3 (p. 35 Consbruch) (π. ἰωνικοῦ τοῦ ἀπὸ  
μείζονος)

καὶ τρίμετρα βραχυκατάληκτα τὰ καλούμενα Πραξίλλεια, ἃ τὴν  
μὲν πρώτην ἔχει ἰωνικὴν, τὴν δὲ δευτέραν τροχαϊκὴν, οἷα ἔστι τὰ  
τοιαῦτα Σαπφῶς·

πλήρης μὲν ἐφαίνεται ἃ σελάννα,  
αἱ δ' ὡς περὶ βῶμον ἐστάθησαν

cf. P. Oxy. 220 col. ix (v. inc. auct. 18)

149 Apollonius Dyscolus, *Pronouns*

And σφι, 'to them', is used in Aeolic with initial α<sup>1</sup>; cf. Sappho:

When night-long (sleep) closes their (eyes)

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Alc. 313.

150 Maximus of Tyre, *Orationes*

Socrates was angry with Xanthippe for lamenting when he was dying, and Sappho was angry with her daughter:

For it is not right that there should be lamentation in the house of those who serve the Muses. That would not be fitting for us.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Metre and therefore text uncertain.

151 *Etymologicum Genuinum*

ἄωρος: a lengthened form of ὄρος, which has the same meaning, 'sleep': cf. Callimachus (fr. 177. 28) and Sappho:

and night's black sleep (closes . . .) eyes

152 Scholiast on Apollonius of Rhodes

ἐρευθήεσσα,<sup>1</sup> 'red', is used instead of πυρρά, 'flame-coloured', or ὑπέρυθρος, 'ruddy'. This is contrary to Sappho's description:

mixed with all kinds of colours.

<sup>1</sup> Used by Apollonius to describe Jason's cloak.

154 Hephaestion, *Handbook on Metres* (on the ionic *a maiore*)

And there are brachycatalectic trimeters which are called Praxilleans; these have an ionic in the first metron and a trochaic in the second (- - υ υ / - υ - υ / - -). Compare this example from Sappho:

The <sup>1</sup> moon was coming into view in its fulness, and when the women took their position round the altar . . .

<sup>1</sup> Probably the beginning of a poem.

159 Max. Tyr. 18. 9g (p. 232 Hobein)

λέγει που και Σαπφοῖ ἡ Ἀφροδίτη ἐν ἄσματι  
. . . σύ τε κάμμος θεράπων Ἔρος

172 Max. Tyr. 18. 9gh (p. 232 Hobein)

ἡ Διοτίμα λέγει ὅτι θάλλει μὲν Ἔρος εὐπορῶν, ἀποθνήσκει δὲ ἀπορῶν· τοῦτο ἐκείνη (sc. Σαπφῶ) ξυλλαβοῦσα εἶπεν γλυκύπικρον (fr. 130. 2) καὶ

ἀλγεσιδωρον.

208 Himer. Or. 46. 6 (p. 186s. Colonna)

τὰ δὲ σὰ νῦν δέον καὶ αὐτῷ τῷ Μουσαγέτῃ εἰκάζεσθαι, οἷον αὐτὸν καὶ Σαπφῶ καὶ Πίνδαρος (cf. *Pae.* 3) ἐν ᾧδῇ κόμῃ τε χρυσῇ καὶ λύραις κοσμήσαντες, κύκνοις ἔποχον εἰς Ἑλικῶνα πέμψουσι, Μούσαις Χάρισι τε ὁμοῦ συγχορεύοντα.

159 Maximus of Tyre, *Orations*

Aphrodite says to Sappho in one of her songs:  
. . . you and my servant Eros

172 Maximus of Tyre, *Orations*

Diotima says <sup>1</sup> that Love flourishes when he has abundance but dies when he is in need: Sappho combined these ideas and called Love bitter-sweet (130. 2) and  
pain-giver.

<sup>1</sup> See Plato, *Symposium* 203b ff.

208 Himerius, *Orations*

Your situation should now be compared with that of the Leader of the Muses himself <sup>1</sup> as he appears when Sappho and Pindar (*Paeon* 3) in their songs deck him out with golden hair and lyre and send him drawn by swans to Mount Helicon to dance there with the Muses and Graces.

<sup>1</sup> Apollo; cf. Alc. 307(c).

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