Loose Limbs, Mutilated Fragments

Why is Algernon Charles Swinburne remembered as the most Sapphic of Victorian poets, if not indeed the very reincarnation of Sappho? "No bard of the present age has a genius more akin to hers, more passionate and fiery, than Mr. Swinburne," proclaims an anonymous reviewer in the Athenæum: a conventional opinion, but curious because it appears in the context of a review of Michael Field (Athenæum 1889: 56). While offering praise for the Sapphic lyrics in Long Ago, the reviewer believes that Michael Field "has not, indeed, the impulsive spring of uncontrollable passion which is characteristic of the true lyric poet," nor "the infinite command of musical metres" of a poet like Swinburne (57). What is "impulsive," "uncontrollable," and infinitely "musical" in Swinburne is his unsurpassed metrical virtuosity, the passionate rhythms that rule his verse, and especially his imitations of Sappho. In "Anactoria," his most famous and most scandalous poem, Swinburne turns Sappho's lyricism into a lurid meditation on the pleasures of rhythm: the beating of Sappho the Lesbian into a lesbian body. In contrast to the playful troping on the name of Sappho by Michael Field, Swinburne therefore makes a lesbian reading of Sappho sexually explicit.

The differential use of Sappho within male and female homoeroticism is an important issue, as Thais Morgan points out: through his identification with Sappho, Swinburne constructs a male lesbian body, a transgressive female figure for "homoerotically inclined masculinity, but a masculinity that continues to define itself in difference from femininity, including a lesbian femininity" (1992: 52). This subtle formulation allows us to distinguish between various "lesbian" versions of Sappho and may explain in part why Michael Field is so easily eclipsed by Swinburne: the Victorian Sappho we remember is his dominatrix, a dominant poetic figure throughout the late Victorian period. But to read his masculine version of lesbian desire in terms of homosexual practice, as Morgan suggests in concurrence with Richard Dellamora and other recent critics, is not to read one important part of the Sapphic body as it is figured by Swinburne. While Morgan concludes that "in 'Anactoria,' Swinburne imagines homosexual practice between men through the analogy of lesbian coupling" (49), I suggest that the Sapphic body emerges in Swinburne's poetry as a rhythmicized, eroticized form, less a "male lesbian body" than an embodiment of the rhythm of eros itself, a scattering movement too diffuse to be contained within any single body, and increasingly formalized by Swinburne into a metrical pattern.

For Swinburne, Sapphic eros is a structure of repetition that allows the body to emerge in the reiteration of its own undoing. His reading of Sappho derives from fragment 190, which dramatizes the effects of eros on a body that trembles in violent contradiction, at the moment of coming apart:

"Ερος δ' ἤπειρε μ' ὄλυμπης δόνας
γένησεν ἰδίων δόξον ἀπεδέκτης
And eros again the loosener of limbs makes me tremble
A sweet-bitter unmanagable creature.1

Eros is often called "the loosener of limbs" in archaic Greek lyric: "Ερος λυσίμαλις." The epithet lusimélēs (associated with the verb luo, "to loosen," and the noun melē, "limbs," ) describes a force so powerful it dissolves the joints and disjoins the body, disarticulating the parts from the whole. The grammatical subject of fragment 190 is eros lusimélēs, turning "me" into its tremulous object, subjected to contrary sensations both sweet and bitter (gukupûkron). This painful pleasure is enacted in the present tense, yet also repeated over time, as is evident in the adverbial phrase "and ... again." While in Greek d'ētous follows the word eros, the elided postpositive particle "and" (de) is properly read as preceding eros, implying that this erotic subjection has happened before and will happen again: Sapphic eros is always already happening, a continual movement, a kinetic event.

The epithet for eros, "the loosener of limbs," is more than merely formulaic in this context, as it names a rhythmic effect that is also performed in the pseudo-dactylic rhythm of the fragment, making eros move insidiously like an amakhnon orpeton, a creature creeping up, impossible to fight off, relentlessly advancing in the meter itself. Indeed, fragment 190 has been preserved precisely because of its metrical appeal. We owe the transmission of this Sapphic fragment to the Handbook of Metres of Hephaestion, who quotes the two short lines as example of "the Aeolic dactylic tetramer acatalectic" (Campbell 147). Metrical analysis (the verb "to analyze" is also derived from the Greek verb luo, "to loosen") is another way to measure the rhythms of eros lusimélēs, since the Greek word for limbs (melē) can refer both to the parts of the body and to the parts of song. The melē or "limbs" of Sappho decomposed by eros lusimélēs, may thus be recomposed in the melē or

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1 Fragment 190 (Campbell 146); the English translation is my own.
"melody" of Sapphic song. This is how Sappho, famous for the invention of new rhythms in her Aeolic dialect, came to be known in antiquity: Alexandrian scholars collected Sappho’s songs into volumes entitled Sapphica, a Sapphic corpus celebrated for its metrical perfection, and annotated by ancient commentators such as Heptaenius. By analyzing the meter of Sappho’s fragment—figuratively “loosening” its “limbs,” again—Heptaenius repeats the rhythmic disarticulation and rearticulation of the Sapphic body, and turns Sappho herself into a metrical body that is manifested through and as meter.

There exists, then, 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 kòsta legs, pódès feet, daktýloi fingers, and the Longianian treatise on the sublime also draws on this established homology between poem and body. Meter, according to Longinus, is an important source of sublimity when it organizes language by analogy to the composition of various members of the human body: “None of the members (méle) has any value by itself apart from the others,” he writes, “but if they are united into a single system and embraced moreover by the bonds of rhythm, then by being merely rounded into a period they gain a living voice” (Longinus 40.1, tr. Fyfe). His reading of fragment 31, as we saw in Chapter 1, makes Sappho speak as if “with a living voice” by turning the poem into a body, a formal composition that is held together by the bonds of rhythm. The rhetorical recuperation of fragment 31 therefore assumes a tradition of metrical reading that takes fragment 130 as one of its subtexts, enabling Longinus to exchange the méle of Sappho’s body for the méle of her song: the body scattered by eros lusimèlè is metrically reconstituted—bound together and “rounded” into a period—within the perfect cadence of the Sapphic stanza.

However, as I further argued in my first chapter, the Longinian reading of Sappho also calls into question the doctrine of organic unity. What we discover in the treatise on the sublime is not the rounded body of Sappho’s poem, but a fragmentary text, quoted out of context: when Longinus cites fragment 31, he breaks it off from the Sapphic corpus, and when he further paraphrases the fragment, he enumerates the parts of Sappho that have “wandered apart from herself” in a sentence that also pulls apart the body of the poem. While arguing for Sappho’s recuperation as a unified poetic subject, Longinus therefore perpetuates the fragmentation of Sappho; her poem is a mutilated text rather than a living organism, ironically anatomized as if it were a body, yet resisting integration into an organic whole. Thus Longinus performs not only a movement from literal fragmentation to figurative reconstitution—the sublime turn described by Neil Hertz—but a reversal of that sublime turn, from figurative reconstitution back to a literal fragmentation. Such a reversal points to a counter-reading implicit within the Longinian sublime, a systematic disarticulation of the body that manifests the materiality of language rather than producing a sublimated figure.

It is within this rhetorical tradition that I wish to locate Swinburne’s Sapphic sublime. Swinburne judged Sappho to be “the very greatest poet that ever lived,” as he wrote in a letter of 1880: “Such, I must confess, judging even from the mutilated fragments fallen within our reach from the broken altar of her sacrifice of song, I for one have always agreed with all Grecian tradition in regarding Sappho, beyond all question and comparison to be . . . Sappho is simply nothing less—as she is certainly nothing more—than the greatest poet who ever was at all. —There, at all events, you have the simple and sincere profession of my lifelong faith.” (Letters IV:124) According to Swinburne’s sacrificial logic, Sappho is “nothing less” and “nothing more” than the greatest poet precisely because nothing survives, other than “mutilated fragments.” The long clause (“judging even from . . . ”) that seems to qualify his judgment is hardly concessive here, for it defines the necessary condition of Sappho’s afterlife. What makes Sappho sublime is the mutilation of the Sapphic fragments, allowing her to be simultaneously dismembered and remem-
bered, in a complex mediation between corpse and corpus: the body of the poet is sacrificed to the body of her song, and this body of song is sacrificed to posterity, which recollects the scattered fragments in order to recall Sappho herself as the long-lost origin of lyric poetry. What is “Fallen within our reach” is thus uplifted—sublimated—by Swinburne into a sublime persona, the immortal Sappho; her afterlife is the profession of his “lifelong faith,” and he defines his vocation as lyric poet by worshiping at the broken altar of her sacrifice.

Swinburne’s own poetic corpus, I argue, is also constituted on a Sapphic model, as Swinburne is increasingly cast—by himself as well as by his readers—in the role of Sappho. But just as the Longinian reading of Sappho is predicated on catachresis—the figure of abuse, disfiguring the body—Swinburne’s Sapphic imitations also perform the undoing of the Sapphic body. Swinburne turns Sappho into a figure for the figure of abuse, a double catachresis that makes her both cause and effect of a rhetorical violence that forcefully scatters the body. In “Anactoria,” the notorious Sapphic monologue that provoked the succès de scandale of Poems and Ballads in 1866, Swinburne presents Sappho as a body simultaneously abusing and abused:

My life is bitter with thy love; thine eyes
Blind me, thy tresses burn me, thy sharp sighs
Divide my flesh and spirit with soft sound,
And my blood strengthens, and my veins abound.
I pray thee sigh not, speak not, draw not breath;
Let life burn down, and dream it is not death.
I would the sea had hidden us, the fire
(Will thou fear that, and fear not my desire?)
Severed the bones that bleach, the flesh that cleaves
And let our sifted ashes drop like leaves.
I feel thy blood against my blood: my pain
Pains thee, and lips bruise lips, and vein stings vein.

The opening lines of this dramatic monologue are a repetition of fragment 51; eyes are blinded, ears are suffused with sound, fire burns under the skin, and the entire body trembles on the verge of death. But whose body? Sappho’s or Anactoria’s? “I” and “thou” suffer equally in a mutual subjection that divides subject from object, rendering them apart yet also rendering them interestingly interchangeable. The enjambments in this passage suspend the body in a perpetual state of self-division: “thine eyes / Blind me,” “thy sharp sighs / Divide my flesh,” and culminating in “my pain / Pains thee.” This enjambed chiasmus doubles the pain and directs it both ways, like the verbal doubling in “lips bruise lips” and “vein stings vein,” leaving us unable to distinguish any longer between “thy blood” and “my blood.” Divided into many parts, separate but also together, different but also the same, Sappho and Anactoria embody the paradox of “flesh that cleaves;” here, as so often in Swinburne’s verse, the verb “to cleave” is used anagnostically—meaning both “to join” and “to separate”—in order to describe a body held together only by falling apart. Thus Swinburne’s Sappho is undone as she is made by the force of her own sublime rhetoric.

Not only is the fragmentation of the Sapphic body enacted rhetorically in the address to Anactoria, it is also manifested graphically in the manuscript of Swinburne’s poem itself. In a draft of Anactoria, 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 spayed in every direction (figure 7). The lines are written at several different angles, with interpolations and revisions in tortured writing along the margins. Line 9, for example, disintegrates under the pressure of Swinburne’s revisions: “(Severed the) (Divided) Severed the bones that bleach, the flesh that cleaves.” What is severed, divided, and severed again is the “body” of language itself, dissociated in the assertion of its own severing. A similar linguistic disintegration occurs in Swinburne’s revision of lines 11–12, as they are scribbled in the margins of his draft: “I feel thy blood against my blood: (thine veins) (my pain) my pain (Fill me) (Filling) (Pains thee,) (Pains thee) all through, and vein throbs hard on vein,) Pains thee, (and mouth) and lip hurts lip, (and) and vein (aches on) stings vein.” While these fragmentary lines are reintegrated in the final version of Swinburne’s poem—harmonized into the lyricism of his couplet—they nevertheless reveal how the composition of Sappho into a lyric figure depends on the recomposition of many decomposing parts.

Swinburne’s Sapphic sublime therefore oscillates between an ironic organicism and a linguistic materialism; Swinburne remembers Sappho by dismembering the Sapphic corpus, and like Longinus, he uses the figure of her mutilated body to materialize a fragmentary text. Of course the sublime sadomasochism of “Anactoria,” a poem vehemently attacked by the critics, was a deliberate attempt to scandalize Swinburne’s readers; but it further serves to demonstrate what Isobel Armstrong has aptly called “Swinburne’s fevered sense of the brute materiality of language” (1993: 403). I agree with Armstrong that his poetry tends toward a ma-
terialism which leaves us with the literal sign and that only" (404), and in the pages that follow, I will suggest why and how Swinburne discovers this radical literalism through Sappho in particular. Swinburne considered fragment 31 “a poem that could not be reproduced in the body” and in “Notes on Poems and Reviews,” he defends “Anactoria” as a free imitation of the fragment because “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” (Hyder 1966: 21). When he incorporates the Sapphic fragments into the body of his own writing, Swinburne therefore performs the undoing of an organic figure for poetry; the impact of the missing “body” of Sappho is felt precisely in the pathos of Swinburne’s literalism, in his attention to the “literal and absolute words” that are never adequate to or always “viler” (more fevered, more brute) than Sappho’s.

To illustrate different versions of Swinburne’s Sapphic sublime, I shall consider in further detail “Anactoria” and “Sapphics,” both published in the first series of Poems and Ballads (1866), and “On the Cliffs,” published in Songs of the Spring-Tides (1880). This long and complex later lyric reflects on Swinburne’s earlier identification with Sappho, by reinvoking “the singing soul that makes his soul sublime / Who hears the far fall of its fire-fledged rhyme.” Swinburne makes his claim to the sublime by measuring a long line of descent from Sappho to himself, as he echoes the cadence or “far fall” of Sappho’s poetry in his own. This echo is heard in the repetition of her “singing soul” in his “soul,” even while we also hear the word that is not repeated: the “singing” itself. Swinburne’s Sappho emerges in this way as a decadent figure, a descending cadence, a song fallen into decline. Without repeating Sappho verbatim, Swinburne recalls her in his poetry by means of a rhythmic reiteration that takes the place of Sapphic song. What survives is a Sapphic rhythm, never fully remembered but also never forgotten.

In “Satia te Sanguine,” another early lyric from Poems and Ballads, Swinburne describes Sappho dissolving into a sea that is his recurring figure for pure rhythm:

As the lost white feverish limbs
Of the Lesbian Sappho, adrift
In foam where the sea-weed swims,
Swam loose for the streams to lift.

(9–12)

Sappho’s suicidal leap from the Leucadian Cliff into the waters below is her immersion in a larger rhythmic body; forever dissolving in the streams that set her adrift, the body of Sappho is now absorbed in the sea’s undulations. Her limbs are lost, loosened, and lifted by the waves in
a perpetual motion that repeats the movement of the Longinian sublime: rising and falling, falling and rising, Sappho is suspended between literal disintegration and figurative reconstitution, a sublimated body no longer defined as an organic unity. She is, rather, a rhythmized body that disappears and reappears in the rhythms of its own scattering: in the dissolution of her limbs is the melody of Sapphic song.

Swinburne therefore incorporates the fragments of Sappho into his own poetry by undoing the Sapphic body: his stanza recalls the “feverish” body of fragment 51, pale and trembling on the verge of death, and points to the rhythmic repetition of erōs lusitātēs in fragment 130 as well. In his Sapphic imitations, Sappho is the embodiment of a rhythm that Swinburne increasingly turns into an abstract metrical principle. In the following section of this chapter, I read “Anactoria” as an allegory of sublime rhythm: in this dramatic monologue, Sapphic eros is allegorized as a rhythmic effect that recoils the scattered body of Anactoria into Sapphic song and scatters the body of Sappho into the world. This Sapphic vision is projected into the future, when Sappho will be remembered in all the rhythms of nature, and live on in the memories of men. “On the Cliffs”—written more than two decades later—is the memory of one such man, namely Swinburne himself, who creates a lyric autobiography by projecting his own future vision of Sappho back into the past. He recalls a nightingale heard in youth and calls it Sappho, yet as I shall argue, the song he remembers proves to be a memory of memorization. In the long apostrophe of this poem, Sapphic song is necessarily mediated by writing, a structure of citation and reiteration that repeats the words of Sappho in written form and performs the conversion of Sapphic rhythm into meter as a form of material inscription.

In the third section of the chapter, I demonstrate how meter itself materializes in graphic form, in Swinburne’s poem “Sapphics.” It is a display of metrical virtuosity, written in Sapphic stanzas, and published along with “Anactoria” as a less scandalous yet equally spectacular exploration of Swinburne’s Sapphic sublime. Here the sublime affect of “Anactoria” is transposed into a metrical effect; rather than personifying Sappho in a dramatic monologue, Swinburne embodies her in the form of the Sapphic stanza. This body of Sapphic song—the “Lesbian music” that Sappho is said to have inspired—is visualized graphically, in a metrical pattern presented to the eye: the “visible song” of Sappho is a music we no longer hear but see. I place my reading of “Sapphics” within the context of Victorian metrical theory, and in particular the 1857 “Essay on English Metrical Law” by Coventry Patmore, who defines meter as the corporeal element in language. Swinburne’s experiments in meter can be read as a perverse response to Patmore. He displays the corporeality of language in his early Sapphic imitations, and, even more hyperbolically, in his flâneur verse from the same decade. But this imposition of a metrical pattern on a rhythmized body also refuses an organic reading of meter. By surrendering to compulsory form, or “suffering meter,” Swinburne offers himself up to another account of meter that makes the body legible only through the counting of marks and the measuring of intervals between: a formal abstraction.

My chapter concludes with a brief recounting of Swinburne’s reception, insofar as it repeats the logic of his Sapphic sublime. Abused by critics, Swinburne becomes a body for allusory, mutilated and sacrificed to posterity so that he may emerge, not unlike Sappho, as an exemplary lyric figure. Toward the turn of the century Swinburne is increasingly admired for his metrical virtuosity, and after his death he too is read as the perfect incarnation of meter: his poetic corpus is remembered as a metrical body, inspiring the next generation of poets to renewed experimentation in quantitative verse, and reflecting the emergence of the new prosody in mid-century England. Thus, although Robert Buchanan in “The Fleshly School of Poetry” famously attacked “the Swinburnean female” as “the large-limbed sterile creature who never conceives,” Swinburne’s conception of Sappho generates a rebirth with Victorian poetry. In his famous elegy for Swinburne, Thomas Hardy echoes the melody that issues from the limbs of Swinburne’s Sappho: “His singing-mistress verily was no other / Than she the Lesbian,” Hardy writes in “A Singer Asleep.” 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.” Having memorized the Sapphic cadence of Swinburne, however, Hardy never fully remembers him; the elegy is also a way of forgetting Swinburne, a repetition that leaves behind an empty form. This melancholy emptying out of form is a keen response to the formalism of Swinburne’s poetry and initiates a tradition of reading that recollects Swinburne, like Sappho, in scattered parts.

The Sapphic Scene of Instruction

“We in England are taught, are compelled under penalties to learn, to construe, and to repeat, as schoolboys, the imperishable and incomparable verses of that supreme poet; and I at least, am grateful for the training” (“Notes on Poems and Reviews,” Swinburne 1966: 20). In Swinburne’s reminiscence “that supreme poet” is of course Sappho, and the compulsory—indeed, for Swinburne, compulsive—repetition of her verses introduces what I would like to call the Sapphic scene of instruction. It is a primal scene, surcharged with libidinal investments that make his initiation into Classical learning the origin of both pain and pleasure:
not merely a translation from Greek into English, but a stern discipline
enforced by corporal punishment. In Victorian England schoolboys were
whipped for not knowing the rules of Greek grammar and prosody, or, in
the case of Swinburne, knowing them only too well. He attributes his metrical
virtuosity to the time in his youth when Classical meters were litera-
arily beaten into his body. Thus in a personal letter, Swinburne recalls a
tutor whose "pet subject was metre," and although "my ear for verses made
me rather a favourite," he is pleased to confess that this rigid disciplinar
"never wanted reasons for making rhymes between his birch and my
body" (Letters I: 78). The tutor, playing on the boy like an instrument, has
taught him a masochistic relation to language: through rhythmic beating
Swinburne learns to internalize the beat of poetry. Memorization be-
comes a form of incorporation for him, the figurative repetition of a li-
cetal violence as well as the literal repetition of a figurative violence. This
is how Swinburne has memorized the verses of Sappho, by incorporating
their rhythm into his own punished body, "compelled under penalties" yet "grateful for the training."

Sappho serves, then, as part of Swinburne's education in the discipli-
nary measures of meter. "More than any other's, her verses strike and
strike the memory," he writes in "Notes on Poems and Reviews" (1966: 21),
transferring the painful punishment of English schoolboys to the aes-
thetic pleasures of learning Sapphic rhythm. Indeed, he casts Sappho in
a role not unlike his fantastic tutor: a singing mistress, verily, who
TEACHES Swinburne the striking power of her poetry by forcing him to sub-
mit to its rhythm. In this respect the Sapphic scene of instruction replays
a scenario of domination and submission familiar to us from the Longin-
ian treatise on the sublime. According to Longinus, sublime language has
the power to thrill and enthral the reader, who is voluntarily struck,
pierced, stung, burned, scourged, beaten, and enslaved when the sub-
line strikes, like a bolt of lightning. "Such passages exercise an irresistible
power of mastery (dunameian kai bian amachon) and get the upper hand
with every member of the audience," Longinus asserts (1.4; tr. Fyfe). This
overwhelming force (amachon, Longinus calls it) resonates with the de-
scription of Sapphic eros as an irresistible (amachon) creature, impos-
sible to fight off, thus associating Sappho herself with an irresistible
power of mastery that seduces Swinburne. Dominated by the sublime
Sappho, Swinburne is only too eager to give her the upper hand; she is
the mistress, he the slave. Thus he worships Sappho's "divine words which
even as a boy I could not but recognise as divine" ("Notes" 20) and he
"would not debase and degrade them into a viler form" (21). As a Sapp-
phic imitator he would rather abase himself, degrading his own poetry in
a self-revelling pose: "No one can feel more deeply than I do the inade-
quacy 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.'
Her remaining verses are the supreme success, the final achievement, of
the poetic art" (21). By placing Sappho on a high pedestal, Swinburne
measures his descent from her, in both senses: no man can come close to
her, but also, no man has come closer than he.

With his ear attuned to the sadomasochistic subtext of the sublime,
Swinburne performs a perversive turn on Longinus—yet another example
of the "poetic perversities" described by Richard Dellamora and other re-
cent critics who find a transgressive eroticism in Swinburne's writing. 5
Mixing aesthetic and pornographic discourses, Swinburne produces
ironic inversions of both semantic and sexual categories, reversing the hi-
erarchy of masculine over feminine, making the female principle domi-
nant, and implicitly feminizing the male subject. It is not surprising, then,
to find a chapter devoted to Swinburne in Camille Paglia's Sexual Per-
sone, imagining Sappho as his domatrix: "Swinburne's Sappho, like
the lesbian marquise of Balzac's The Girl with the Golden Eyes, is a female
hierarch," Paglia writes (474), with emphasis on Swinburne's relish for
suffering under such a despotistic figure: "He revives Sappho in propria per-
sone in order to be crushed yet again beneath female superiority" (477).
While Paglia's wishful projection of a sexual persona for Sappho assumes
a critical strategy of personification that my own argument calls into ques-
tion, it is true that Swinburne's Sapphic sublime is a violence he rather
suffers than asserts. Thus he defends "Anactoria" not as an attempt to
identify with Sappho by imitating her words, but "to work into words of
my own some expression of their effect: to bear witness how, more than
any other's, her verses strike and sting the memory in lonely places, or at
sea, among all loftier sights and sounds" ("Notes" 21). Here Swinburne
strikes a characteristically masochistic pose, as he bears witness to verses
that strike and sting by willingly bearing their pain; he expresses the ef-
fect of Sappho's words as a traumatic inscription, leaving their mark on
his memory.

We encounter variations on the Sapphic scene of instruction in Leslie
Brandon, a novel that was indeed inspired by Balzac but left unfinished by
Swinburne and unpublished during his lifetime. 6 Drafted when Swin-

5 In his chapter on "Poetic Perversities of A. C. Swinburne," Dellamora describes Swin-
burne as a "subversive poet" ("subversive critique of pensive somatic processes") (1990:83); see
also Sieburt 1984 and Pomeroy 1997: 76-77. Over the past decade, critics have increas-
ingly emphasized strategies of subversion and perversion in the poetry of Swinburne, and
particularly in his use of Sappho. For recent readings of "Anactoria," see, e.g., Cook 1971,

6 Swinburne's unfinished novel, which he called "An étude à la Balzac plus la poésie" (Letter
I: 264) is an experiment in several genres including personal memoir, narrative fic-
tion, prose poetry, and lyrical ballads. The title Leslie Brandon was assigned by Thomas Wise.
burne was also composing his early imitations of Sappho, this mock autobiography narrates the education of young Herbert Seyton, preparing for Eton. Like Swinburne, Herbert has a tutor whose "chief diversion was to ply upon the boy's mind as on an instrument" (21): a euphemism for his rigorous and regular application of the birch to the boy's body, especially after Herbert's lessons in Latin and Greek. If he does not learn his Classical meters, Herbert is forewarned he will be "swished" even harder at Eton. Meanwhile, Lesbia Brandon is held up to Herbert as an instructive example for achieving perfect meter: a girl who "can do Sapphics fit for a sixth-form" (53) and writes English verses as if she were "the real modern Sappho" (54). When Herbert reads a volume of Lesbia's published poems, he discovers "a certain fire and music in the verse at its best which had sung and soothed him alternately with gentle and violent delight" (87). Struck by the power of her poetry, Herbert later confesses his passion to Lesbia; but she, "ignorant of man's love," is like an unapproachable goddess whose cold reply leaves him "wrung and stung meantime by strange small tortures" (100-101).

The sentimental, if not to say sensational, education of Herbert Seyton thus conflates subjection to a schoolmaster who whips with the birch, and eroticized submission to a Lesbian mistress who whips with words, making him particularly susceptible to poetic rhythm as a source of painful pleasure. Herbert's sister explains this peculiar susceptibility by describing poetry as another form of flagellation: "Things in verse hurt one, don't they? hit and sting like a cut. They wouldn't hurt us if we had no blood, and no nerves. Verse hurts horribly. . . . You have the nerve of poetry—the soft place it hits on, and stings" (148). The effect of verse is painful, not only by means of the simile "hit and sting like a cut," but in the very cadence of that phrase, as well as its repetition later on: "the soft place it hits on, and stings." It is through rhythmic beating that "verse hurts horribly," transferring the effect of "things in verse" to the action of the "verse" itself: it is like flagellation and it flagellates, it is both the whipping and the being whipped. Herbert's vulnerability to that painful reversal gives him "the nerve of poetry," in both the active and the passive sense, as the rhythms inscribed on his body by whipping are repeated in his experience of poetic rhythm.

Herbert feels this rhythmic effect on the body while swimming, as well. In the sea he hears "suppressed semitones of light music struck out of shingle or sand by the extended fingers of foam" and the waves are like "hard heavy hands that beat out their bruised life from sinking bodies of men"; thus he imagines the sea as a "visible goddess," who seems to, "strove and stung him all over as with soft hands and sharp lips" (9-10). Herbert submits to this goddess, just as he submits to the beatings of his heavy-handed tutor. In one particularly painful episode, Herbert returns from his swim, whipped by the sea, only to be whipped again by the tutor who makes him sing out sharply in pain: the half-suppressed sobs and gasps struck out of his body repeat the suppressed semitones of light music heard at sea (32-33). The tendency to associate the rhythms of the sea with flagellation and poetic rhythm—especially the sting of Lesbia's verse—recalls Swinburne's description of Sappho, whose verses also seem to "strike and sting the memory in lonely places, or at sea." Whipped and scourged like Herbert Seyton by the waves of that visible goddess—the sea as figure for Sappho, and Sappho as figure for the sea—Swinburne wants to feel her rhythms on his body. Thus in a letter he confesses a desire "to satiate my craving (ultra Sapphic and plusquam-Sadie) just after the sea" (Letters I. 305). This is more than a passion for swimming. The juxtaposition of Sappho and de Sade in parentheses suggests to what degree Sapphic imitation is already a sadomasochistic fantasy for Swinburne: to repeat Sappho's leap into the sea, to yield to its cold and cruel torture, to submerge himself in a Sapphic rhythm.

Such is the poetic fate that Lesbia, the modern Sappho of Lesbia Brandon, aspires to as well in the final chapter entitled "Leucadia." Here the suicidal Lesbia longs to dissolve like Sappho into a sea that will repeat the disarticulation and rhythmic rearticulation of the Sapphic body. "I dreamt once I saw her fall over a cliff. I wish I were dying out of doors, and by day, I should like my body to be burnt and the ashes thrown into the sea. It is I who have taken the leap now, not she," murmurs Lesbia in her dying words to Herbert (164-65). He visits "the living corpse of Lesbia" after she has swallowed poison; she looks "like one whom death was as visibly devouring limb-meal (158) and dies a sublime death, relaxing "her lifted limbs" (161) until finally "her limbs shuddered now and then with a slow general spasm" (165) and her Sapphic apotheosis is complete: "And that was the last of Lesbia Brandon, poetess and pagan." (166). The limbs of Lesbia's dying body repeat the rhythms of aros lusimelés, so that she may become the reincarnation of Sappho, dissolving into the sea. This is the lesson learned—by Herbert, Lesbia, or Swinburne himself—through the Sapphic scene of instruction: a painful subjection to rhythm, rendering the body an aesthetic object by rhythmizing it.

The sketchy plot and allegorical characters of Lesbia Brandon follow in narrative form—more or less, since Swinburne's draft reads less like a novel than an extended prose poem—the lyric logic that structures "An-

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7 On Swinburne's passion for swimming, see Sprawson 1993: 89-99.
actoria." In Swinburne's dramatic monologue, the exquisitely excruciating torture of Anactoria by Sappho also serves to rhythmize the body. Although Anactoria is mute throughout the poem, she is lifted into language and articulated by the rhythms of Sapphic verse into "dumb tunes and shuddering semitones of death"—echoing the suppressed semitones struck out of Herbert and the shuddering death of Lesbia, in order to demonstrate, once again, how much "things in verse hurt." Addressing Anactoria, Sappho subjects her to a verbal violence that turns pain into poetry:

I would find grievous ways to have thee slain,
Intense device, and superflux of pain;
Vex thee with amorous agonies, and shake
Life at thy lips, and leave it there to ache;
Strain out thy soul with pangs too soft to kill,
Intolerable interludes, and infinite ill;
Relapse and relucation of the breath,
Dumb tunes and shuddering semitones of death.

The "intense device" found by Sappho is an intensification of her own poetic language. To "vex thee" the words of Sappho are themselves vexed and tortured into a curiously self-reflexive literalism, as if the rhyme and rhythm are both cause and effect of Anactoria's pain. Thus "shake" rhymes with "ache," "kill" with "ill," and "breath" with "death," and in the attenuation of phrases like "relapse and relucation of the breath," the verse also corresponds rhythmically to the very rhythm it wishes to induce. The entire passage is a superflux of doubled meanings, turning Anactoria into the musical instrument or "device" for Sappho's melody, as Cecil Lang points out: "intense means 'keen,' but also has its Latin sense of 'strained or 'stretched,'" much as "strain," another pun, suggests 'stretch' or 'make taut' (as on the rack, in torture) and also the musical sense of tightening strings for raising pitch" (Lang 1968: 523–24). Anactoria's cries of pain will be the music played on the instrument of her tortured body: her tunes and tones are, literally, "interludes."

If initially Anactoria is made to feel the violent impact of Sappho's words on her body, increasingly that body becomes the very embodiment of Sapphic song, its lyre:

Would I not hurt thee perfectly? not touch
Thy pores of sense with torture, and make bright
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

The reiteration of "pangs" produces a rhythmic shuddering, in the verse as well as on the body of Anactoria: by hurting her "perfectly" with "perfect pangs"—striking "pang from pang as note is struck from note"—Sappho creates a "perfect mouth," expressing each painful pang as melodious note or rhythmic tone. In this way she can "catch the sob's middle music," making the voice "catch" or stop before words, in order to catch a melody that is beyond words and purely musical. Here Swinburne performs in poetry what he elsewhere declares in prose: "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" (Hyder 1972: 147). He defines Lesbian music in terms of fleshly fever, in an implicit slip from "malady" to "melody," suggesting that Sappho's poetry records—literally, incorporates into the heart—a song of the body that is the only real body of song. Anactoria is the reincarnation of this Lesbian music, but only at the moment of dying, as the body disintegrates. Thus she is tortured into lyrical form: her living limbs are dismembered so that Sappho may remember and "new-mould with these / A lyre of many faultless agonies."

The eroticized torture of Anactoria is, of course, another repetition of eros lustineis. Her transfiguration into a lyre reconfigures the parts of the body—her limbs or melé—into the melé of Sapphic song. We can read Swinburne's dramatic monologue not only as an imitation of Sapphic fragment 31, where the body is undone by eros, but also as a rhetorical expansion of fragment 130, allowing the body to reappear rhythmically. That fragment is paraphrased by Swinburne to suggest the conversion of Anactoria's limbs into metrical feet:

Ah, ah, thy beauty! like a beast it bites,
Stings like an adder, like an arrow smites.
Ah sweet, and sweet again, and seven times sweet
The paces and the pauses of thy feet

Eros strikes again, as in fragment 130: "like a beast it bites," an amachanot orpeton impossible to fight off, stinging like an adder, smiling like an arrow, to produce the rhythmic repetition of "ah, ah" and the measured cadence of "Ah sweet, and sweet again, and seven times sweet." In the very act of apostrophizing Anactoria, Sappho is subjected to the striking rhythm of her own language, traversed by "the paces and the pauses of
thy feet." As a perfectly lyricized body, Anactoria is also the perfection of Sapphic meter, and indeed her very name lends itself to a metrical reading; we can scan the five syllables of "Anactoria" in English to correspond to the number of syllables in the final line of the Sapphic stanza. These five syllables serve as equivalent (more or less, since English does not follow the rules for quantity in Greek) to the metrical unit called adonic, a short fourth line left dangling at the end of the kolon—an other metrical "limb"—that concludes the stanzas composed by Sappho in the meter most directly associated with Lesbian song.

Anactoria is therefore invoked by Sappho as a musical body greater than her own: "but thou—thy body is the song. / Thay mouth the music; thou art more than I" (74–75). Contrary to what we might expect, the dramatic monologue is not named after Sappho herself; it is called "Anactoria," to identify Anactoria as the proper name for a Sapphic rhythm that is allegorized in Swinburne's poem. Although this name is nowhere to be found within the poem itself, and despite her silence throughout the poem, the title names "Anactoria" as the rhythmized body produced by the poem; a silent, absent body made present through Sappho's verse, much as (on another level of representation) Sappho is also presented by Swinburne in the rhythmic form of his own verse. His poem, in other words, is an example of the poetic paradox that Aviram calls "telling rhythm"; he refers simultaneously to "an allegory that attempts to tell rhythm and a rhythm that tellingly cannot be allegorized" (1994: 24). The violent force of Sapphic rhythm, played out on the body of Anactoria, can be understood, in Aviram's terms, as an "interpretation or representation—an allegory—of the bodily rhythmic energy of poetic form," even while this rhythm remains "uninterpretable and sublime" (19). Thus Anactoria appears in the title, as if in quotation marks, as a proper name for the Sapphic rhythm that she embodies: a figure fleshed out by the rhythms of Sappho and bodied forth as rhythm itself.

If we pursue an allegorical reading of rhythm along these lines, we see how Anactoria is made to appear through rhythm in fragment 16 of Sappho as well. The fragment begins with a priamel, a rhetorical device that depends on repetition, in order to describe the movement of desire. What moves the heart, it tells us, is not a host of horsemen, nor an army of footsoldiers, nor a fleet of ships, but "whatsoever one loves" (ὅποιος τις ἀγαπᾷ): less the particular object of desire than desire itself, stronger than any other force on earth. Helen of Troy is adduced as example, set into motion not only as desired object but as desiring subject, simultaneously passive and active in following the desire that led her away from home. Helen "went away" (ἐκδίδεται) and thus introduces the memory of Anactoria, who has also gone away. At this point (after a lacuna in the text), fragment 16 leaves the epic past for the present moment of its own lyric performance, describing the loss of Anactoria and the desire to see her again:

... νῦν Ἀνακτορία ἄφησεν ἀνασκολοπεῖον

... [something] now reminds me of Anactoria who is not here

I would rather see her lovely walk
and the bright lamp of her face

than Lydian war chariots and full-armed footsoldiers

Despite her absence, Anactoria is represented—made present again—in the vivid language of fragment 16; it describes her appearance, her lovely

8 In Telling Rhythm, Aviram points to a new interest in rhythm and meter (as an object of critical inquiry within lyric theory, at least, since poetic practice is never far from such questions). Since in recent decades lyric reading has been primarily rhetorical in emphasis, Aviram calls for a theory of poetry that can account for the appeal of rhythm to the body, although in the course of his argument it becomes difficult to tell how literal he wants this bodily figure to be. Another approach to the reincorporation of rhythm is offered by Susan Stewart, who discovers in "rhythmic forms" the "potential of a recovered somatic meaning." While acknowledging that the term somatic is "not coterminous with the body" (1996: 38–79), Stewart uses a psychoanalytic model that also tends toward an organic and expressionist reading of meter.

9 The papyrus on which fragment 16 is written was found in Egypt in 1905 and first published in 1914 (Grenfell and Hunt 1914). I do not argue that Swinburne was influenced by this fragment, but rather that "Anactoria" sets a precedent for reading the appearance of Anactoria in fragment 16 as a rhythmic allegory.

10 For further discussion of the priamel in fragment 16, see, e.g., Snell 1953: 47–50, A. Burnett 1983: 281f., Winkler 1990: 176–77, all of whom argue that the poem is less concerned with a specific object of desire than a meditation on desire itself. According to this argument, the rhetorical structure of the priamel ("some say... and others say... and others say... but I say...") allows for the emergence of a lyric subject, a first-person ego capable of reflecting on itself. Feminist readings of Sappho develop this reading into a discussion of Sappho as female lyric subject, whose use of the priamel asserts a specifically female desire; see de Duibus 1995: 120–24, Williamson 1995: 166–71. To insist on the ego in fragment 16 as placeholder for the female "voice" of Sappho is, in my view, not the only way to trace a gendered difference in the Sapphic fragments.
way of walking, her radiant face, in order to make her reappear before our very eyes.

This vision of Anactoria is conveyed not only visually but rhythmically as well. There is a recurring emphasis on movement in fragment 16, as Page duBois points out, linking the figures of Helen and Anactoria. In the description of Helen, according to duBois, "the line expresses motion," not only in the verb ἔβα ("went") but in participles that "catch her endlessly moving, taking steps" (102). Likewise Anactoria enters the poem by taking steps, in the description of her "lovely walk" (εὐερόν θερμά), duBois observes: "The εὐέρόν, 'lovely,' echoes εὐάρα, 'one loves,' of line 4, makes whatever is lovely about Anactoria, her step, her way of walking, partake of the general statement at the poem's beginning. The βόμμα, 'step,' 'stride,' is linked etymologically with the verb ἔβα, 'went,' of line 9, and stresses the connection of Helen with the poet's desire, with the woman Anactoria" (105–4). Both Helen and Anactoria are set into motion as figures of desire, and in their movement—the taking of steps—they also seem to embody the poet's desire, registered rhythmically in the poem itself, in the movement of its own "feet." Fragment 16 implies how desire might be mobilized to different ends than Homeric narrative; as a lyric composed in the Sapphic stanza, it moves according to another rhythm and with other consequences. The "lovely walk" of Anactoria manifests a rhythm that distinguishes the melodies of archaic love lyric from the military measures of heroic epic: in contrast to the relentless approach of Lydian armies, Anactoria moves gracefully into view, and the motion of her feet is more desirable than the noise of many footsoldiers (πεζομαχίας). Thus fragment 16 turns away from a familiar epic theme, the story of Helen's departure that is remembered by all, and toward a more intimate memory of Anactoria. While duBois does not read fragment 16 as a rhythmic allegory, she writes suggestively that "much of the intensity of the poem derives from the force of Sappho's personal preference, her ability to make Anactoria walk before us" (106), as if the very cadence of her walk might be conveyed in the Sapphic stanza.

Rather than referring the "force" of the poem back to Sappho's "personal preference," however, we might consider it in terms of the force of its own rhythmic articulation. Since desire is set into motion through (and as) rhythm, it is only by subjection to such forces of rhythm that "Sappho" or "Anactoria" can be constituted, interchangeably, as either subject or object of desire: both are produced by the rhythm of the Sapphic stanza, rather than preceding it.13 If indeed "Anactoria exists briefly

13 DuBois seems to endorse a reading of fragment 16 as "personal testimony" from Sappho (1995: 107), who emerges as a gendered lyric subject through the expression of desire for Anactoria. Rather than insisting on fragment 16 as the personal expression of a self;

for us, recalled to presence through poetry" (duBois 106), she is therefore recalled through poetic rhythm in particular. The recollection of Anactoria depends on the rhythmic recalling of her name, as the very mention of Anactoria brings her into the present tense, propelling the poem out of the past into the lively description that animates her memory. "The moment of presence," according to duBois, "arrives with the name of Anactoria. We are made aware of her absence with ou pareoisas, "not being present": the participle allows us to imagine her presence as well" (103).

To this subtle rhetorical reading, which discovers Anactoria's presence to be already implicit in the proclamation of her absence, I would add that the participle also makes Anactoria present again as a rhythmic repetition, in the five syllables that repeat the syllables of her name: Anaktorias . . . ou pareoisas, "Anactoria . . . who is not here."

The name of Anactoria also echoes in Swinburne's poem, allowing us to hear what is here, namely "Anactoria." While the Greek participle ou pareoisas is not visible in the title of his poem in English, it is still audible as a silent echo of the name of Anactoria, a spectral repetition that reminds us how she is simultaneously absent and present. It is only a step further (so to speak) from this allegorical reading of rhythm to reading "Anactoria" itself as an allegory of rhythm, transposing the feet of Anactoria who seems "to walk before us" into metrical feet. Throughout his Sapphic monologue Swinburne sustains a pun on feet, beginning in line 18 with Sappho's invocation to the "cruel faultless feet" of Anactoria and again "in the paces and pauses of thy feet" in line 118; as we have seen, this line announces the embodiment of Sapphic meter in Anactoria, as she reincarnates the metrical limbs of Sappho's song. In the second section of the dramatic monologue, modulating from address to Anactoria to defiance of God, Sappho further imagines herself as the embodiment of a larger rhythmic principle, with reference to her own "feet":

If my feet trod upon the stars and sun, 150
And souls of men as his have alway trod,
God knows I might be crueler than God.

(150–52)

Increasingly the treading of Sappho's feet is a rhythmic force opposed to the "iron feet" of God (172) or the "slow feet" of Death (256), and the poem culminates in the assertion of a sublime Sapphic rhythm that strikes like lightning "with feet of awful gold."

14 However, we might consider lyric subjectivity in archaic lyric in terms of a subjection to the forces of rhythm (cf. Archilochus fragment 67a: γνῶσοις. ὧν ρυθμὸς ὑπεράσπιζε, "Know what rhythm holds human beings.")
But me—
Men shall not see bright fire nor hear the sea,
Nor mix their hearts with music, nor behold
Cast forth of heaven, with feet of awful gold,
And plumeless wings that make the bright air blind,
Lightning, with thunder for a hound behind
Hunting through fields unfarrowed and unknown,
But in the light and laughter, in the moon
And music, and in grasp of lip and hand
And shudder of water that makes felt on land
The immeasurable tremor of all the sea,
Memories shall mix and metaphors of me.

(203-14)

The passage—an elaborate hyperbaton that exemplifies the rhetorical heightening of the Longinian sublime—is a grand refiguration and amplification of Sapphic fragment 31. Here, in the ten lines inserted between two assertions of “me,” Sappho reveals herself to be a power that structures the entire world: the lightning that blinds, the thunder that deafens, the water that shudders, and the “immeasurable tremor of all the sea” all repeat the rhythms of the tortured and torturing Sapphic body.

Thus Sappho is scattered around the world and recollected by “men” (like Swinburne himself, perhaps: a self-fulfilling prophecy) who “shall not see” without seeing a Sapphic trace in everything they behold; everywhere “memories shall mix and metaphors of me.” This complex line opens up multiple readings. If we take “memories . . . and metaphors” as the double subject of “shall mix”—a zeugma—then are metaphors turning into memories, or memories into metaphors? Where do these memories originate, in Sappho or in those who remember her? Are “metaphors of me” to be read as Sappho’s metaphors or the metaphors made of Sappho? Whose memories and metaphors are they, anyway? The conflation of subjective and objective genitive in “of me” makes Sappho both cause and effect of a metaphorical logic that makes it difficult if not impossible to read her as the “speaker” of this dramatic monologue. She is less a persona than the name for a catachresis that generates a seemingly endless series of similes. Indeed, the phrase “metaphors of me” introduces a long repetition of “like me . . . like me . . . like me” over many lines, enacting the syntactic dispersal of “I” throughout the poem while also describing how Sappho is dispersed all over the world: “Like me shall be the shuddering calm of night” (215), “Like me the one star swooning with desire” (220), “like me the waste white noon” (222), “like me / The land-stream and the tide-stream in the sea” (224–25). As Sappho is revealed in the forces of nature, she becomes a force of nature herself; Swinburne’s similes, as Edward Thomas observes of Swinburne’s poetry in general, “are carried so far that the matter of the simile is more important in the total than what it appeared to intensify” (90). The confusion of tenor and vehicle in this metaphorical logic turns Sappho into the vehicle for the tenor, so that increasingly all the world is but a manifestation of Sapphic rhythm: “And the earth,” Sappho proclaims, “Has pain like mine in her divided breath” (236).

Out of these many versions of “me,” forever multiplying, emerges “I Sappho,” in a moment of ecstatic self-naming:

Violently singing till the whole world sings—
I Sappho shall be one with all these things,
With all high things for ever; and my face
Seen once, my songs once heard in a strange place,
Cleave to men’s lives . . .

(275–79)

Rather than asserting a coherent identity, Sappho is identified here only as the effect of a self-displacing, self-disrupting sublime violence; “violently singing,” she exists in the form of a violent disjunction to which the dash after “sings”—already points. “I Sappho” disappears and reappears through this dash, as a declaration purely in the nominative: a proper name that cannot be referred back to any unified self or organic unity. Often Swinburne’s Sappho has been read by critics as a transcendent lyric subject, proclaiming her sublime transcendence of the material world. However, if we follow the Longinian model that I have proposed, we can read Sappho as the medium for the disintegration of the “whole world” and its rematerialization in many parts. Swinburne’s Sapphic sublime would then be the revelation of a material trace left by Sappho in “all these things.” Each thing is part of “all high things forever,” not by sublimation into a unified whole but by manifesting a power that divides and separates everything. Such perpetual self-division is the legacy of Sapphic song, and it will “cleave to men’s lives” when they, too, are cleaved by it.

22 The tendency to read Swinburne as a poet aspiring to transcendent song is evident in several generations of Swinburne criticism, surveyed by Rookaby and Shrimpton in The Whole Muse of Passion (1998: 1–21); Rookaby himself also tries to recover a “core theme of transcendence” in Swinburne’s work, (1995: 27). An antitranscendent strain is articulated in “Anactoria,” however, as several critics have argued: Cook emphasizes that “Sappho wills a death that is absolutely untranscendent” in Swinburne’s poem (1971: 92); Bristan discerns a double impulse in Swinburne, simultaneously negating and reasserting the corporeality of things (1984: 210); Zonana argues that Swinburne’s Sappho is not a source of transcendent revelation but a means of reincorporation (1998: 39). This “corporality” or “incorporation” can be understood as even more radically “untranscendent” if we read Swinburne’s poem on a nonorganic model, however.
To articulate more fully the implications of this Sapphic vision, Swinburne returns to the heights of the Longinian sublime in "On the Cliffs," virtually translating *Peri Hypsous* into the title of his poem as well as its location. Beginning with the preposition *between*, this later Sapphic lyric is precariously perched on a high point looking down, mediating between night and day, past and future, the Leucadian Cliff of Sappho and the North Sea landscape of Swinburne's own verse.\(^{13}\) "On the Cliffs" is Swinburne's version of a crisis poem: a long and complex ode that confronts spatial and temporal disjunction through the figure of Sappho. As Swinburne exchanges the form of his earlier dramatic monologue for secondperson address, the central act of nomination in his later poem is no longer "I Sappho," but a sustained effort to recall "a name above all names" (xii) until finally Sappho can be properly named and addressed. This prolonged apostrophe creates a rhetorical elevation, a visionary revelation "on the cliffs" that allows Swinburne to make his own claim to the sublime by reinventing Sappho:

> The singing soul that makes his soul sublime  
> Who hears the far fall of its fire-fledged rhyme  
> Till darkness as with bright and burning rain  
> Till all the live gloom inly glows, and light  
> Seems with the sound to cleave the core of night.  

(XVI)

Here "the singing soul that makes his soul sublime" also makes each soul interchangeable with the other. As Jerome McGann points out, "All the terms have convertible referents" in this passage: "We may ask, for example, to what (or to whom) 'The singing soul' refers, or 'his soul . . . who hears,' or 'its fire-fledged rhyme.' In each case the answer awaits upon the completion of grammar. 'The singing soul' is that which 'makes his soul sublime.' But this answer is only partially useful since we don't know to whom 'his' refers until we read still further: Who hears the far fall of its fire-fledged rhyme? The referent of 'its' now becomes questionable, though one grasps soon enough that it goes back (for once) to 'singing soul' (1972: 160–61). Where indeed does Sapphic song originate, in "the singing soul" or "his soul sublime"? And in "the far fall of its fire-fledged rhyme" does "its" refer to the song of burning Sappho, fledged in fire, or the fledgling rhyme that repeats it? Not only does the circularity of reference make "his," "who," and "its" questionable, it also raises questions about the status of song defined by a "far fall": a repetition of Sappho's cadence or a song fallen far from Sappho, a distant echo or a measure of distance from that origin? If, as McGann suggests, "the answer waits upon the completion of grammar" (and if indeed, as he also argues, the whole poem "turns upon Swinburne's own desire for an 'answer' from Sappho," 76), then the answering voice that Swinburne awaits is already emerging in the course of his own apostrophe to her.

Swinburne therefore writes from the perspective of one of those men who (as prophesied in "Anactoria") cleaves to, and is cleaved by, the song of Sappho. But in "On the Cliffs" he envisions Sapphic rhythm on an even larger scale, surpassing his earlier vision of Sappho in "Anactoria." Not only will Sapphic song "cleave" anyone who listens, but it will "cleave the core of night" as well, subsuming all the forces of nature and history in order to penetrate the rhythms of time itself. The "cleaving" of Sapphic song (again, to be understood both transitively and intransitively, to describe the scattering effect of words that are themselves already scattered) anticipates the final stanza of "On the Cliffs," where Swinburne meditates on a metaphysical power that produces the physical universe; in this visionary moment, it seems that even "the sulleness of the two-edged spear of time" cannot stop the eternal rhythm of Sappho's scattering. The last line of the poem proclaims that Sappho's song is "fire everlasting of eternal life," repeating a line from stanza V where the song will "bear till time's wing tire" is "life everlasting of eternal fire." The line is repeated with a subtle variation that makes both "life" and "fire" everlasting, not because the repetition of her song transcends time but because it is a measure of temporality itself; measured in time, the cadence (or "far fall") of Sapphic song therefore lasts forever.

"On the Cliffs" can be read as a metalepsis of "Anactoria," a temporal inversion casting a vision of the future into the past and a vision of the past into the future. Swinburne moves from the scandalous rhetoric of "Anactoria" to the metaphysical rhapsodies of "On the Cliffs," in a strategy of revision and self-reversal that is characteristic of Swinburne's later poetry.\(^{14}\) In a letter Swinburne describes the new "rhapsody" he is composing, which abandons the pathos of his earlier dramatic monologue in order to meditate on his Sapphic sublime in more abstract terms. The inspiration for "On the Cliffs," he writes to Watts, is a nightingale he heard in youth and identified as Sappho:

You will regret to hear that in subject-matter and treatment ["On the Cliffs"] is not akin to ["Anactoria"]. . . I fear there is not overmuch hope of a fresh scandal and consequent "succès de scandale" from a mere rhapsody just four lines short of four hundred (oddly enough) on the song of a nightingale

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\(^{13}\) For a discussion of the sublime landscape in "On the Cliffs," see Fletcher 1986.

\(^{14}\) The contradiction between the aberrant and the transcendent produce[s] the the\-matics of Swinburne's later verse," Armstrong observes (1993: 417); Greenberg (1976, 1991) considers more specifically how Swinburne revisits and revises his earlier Sapphic imitation in the later work.
by the sea-side. 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 on me listening quite suddenly 1) that this was not Philomela—2) in the same instant, who this was. It is no theory, but a fact, as I can prove by the science of notation. (Letters IV: 78)

Here the Sapphic scene of instruction is no longer a discipline imposed on boys at school, but discovered "one day in my midsummer school holidays," in a seemingly natural setting, "by the sea-side." The nightingale, "the truth concerning whom ... flashed on me listening," is a strange bird, however, not to be found in nature: the poetic genealogy of "that much misrepresented bird" includes not only the Ovidian Philomela but the nightingales of Milton and Keats (as well as Shelley's skylark, another important Romantic precursor). By tracing the lineage of the nightingale back to its "real personality," namely Sappho, Swinburne discovers an earlier point of origin for a song that is echoed by all other poets but is itself also defined as echo or repetition. What this bird teaches Swinburne is a song that reveals, "quite suddenly," in a flash of recognition, the sublime power of rhythm.

Swinburne's insistence that his "anti-Ovidian" theory can be proved "by the science of notation" is more than an afterthought in this account, for it defines the way in which Sappho's song is remembered, or more accurately, memorized. "Notation" here refers to the act of transcribing the nightingale's song into Sapphic rhythm as well as inscribing it in graphic form: Sappho's tones survive as notes, a metrical notation or written record that Swinburne memorized in youth but remembers as pure song by forgetting its origin in writing. The Sapphic scene of instruction is therefore inserted in "On the Cliffs" as a memory of memorization. Swinburne calls upon Sappho by recalling the nightingale he describes in his letter, a bird whose cry of spring—in the spring of his youth—was an early revelation of Sapphic rhythm:

I have known thee always who thou art,
Nor ever have given light ear to storied song
That did thy sweet name sweet unwitting wrong,
Nor ever have called thee nor would call for shame,
Thou knowest, but inly by thine only name,
Sappho—because I have known thee and loved, hast thou
None other answer now?
As brother and sister were we, child and bird,
Since thy first Lesbian word
Flamed on me, and I knew not whence I knew
This was the song that struck my whole soul through,

Swinburne represents his encounter with "thy first Lesbian word" as a memory of something already known ("I have known thee always") but without knowing its origin ("I knew not whence I knew") and without knowing what it means ("even when I knew not—ever ere sooth was seen—"); it is a memory of something memorized but forgotten as such, displaced onto a memory from childhood and projected onto nature.13

Despite the appearance of a natural setting, this passage self-consciously replays the sublime scenario by now familiar to us. Swinburne is "struck" and "pierced" by the song of the nightingale, even before learning to identify it "inly by thine only name," the name of Sappho; he knows the meaning of her cry because he has already incorporated its rhythm into his own body. Thus Swinburne distinguishes his lyric persona as a sublime Sapphic poet from imitators of Sappho who have merely "given light ear to storied song" about Sappho, without recognizing her as the embodiment of a larger rhythmic principle. Swinburne's inner ear, by contrast, is already attuned to the painful pleasures of such rhythm: like a bolt of lightning straight out of Longinus, Sappho's primal word "flamed on me" and with sublime violence she penetrates his "keen spirit of sense with edge more keen." The phrase "spirit of sense" recalls Sappho's desire "to wring thy very spirit through the flesh" in "Anactoria," and indeed, not unlike Anactoria, the body of Swinburne is rhythmized by Sappho; she wrings the spirit through the flesh, making body and soul inseparable from each other, interpenetrated by her rhythm. Throughout "On the Cliffs" Swinburne therefore emphasizes the power Sappho exerts over him, in terms that recall the pattern of domination and submission implicit in the Longinian sublime: in stanza XVI he worships her "sovereign Lesbian song," and in stanza XXVII he is ruled by "thy ruling song" and transported "in thy strong rapture of imperious joy."

The sublimity of Sappho's rapturous, ruling song inheres, paradoxically, in the written word. For it is only through reinscription of that song "by the science of notation"—meaning notes or marks or any other material trace produced by memorizing Sappho's words—that the idea of Sappho can emerge. Swinburne writes "On the Cliffs" in the vocative as a sublime ode to Sappho, but even while his long invocation creates the

13 In identifying "brother and sister... child and bird," and remembering a bird "whose cry was but of spring," Swinburne also revisits "Ilyus," another early lyric from Poems and Ballads.
illusion of address, the echoing response he seeks from Sappho is achieved by textual repetition rather than vocal doubling; indeed, his poem emphasizes various forms of quotation, citation, allusion, and translation that mediate the claim to voice through writing. Such mediation is already announced in the epigraph to "On the Cliffs," where two words from Sappho are quoted (ιμερόφωνος ἓδην) to introduce the "loving-voiced nightingale," or more literally, the nightingale with a voice that is both "desiring" and "desired." This nightingale celebrated by Sappho serves as Swinburne’s figure for Sappho: simultaneously voicing desire and desiring voice, yet eternally unfulfilled in both. But as it is written in Greek, the epigraph also reminds us that the ιμερόφωνος ἓδην no longer sings in a pure unmediated voice; the song of the Sapphic nightingale is lost in translation, yet survives by being translated. The revelation of Sappho’s “first Lesbian word” depends on multiple acts of translation from Greek to English, voice to text, past to present, bird to poet, all performed in Swinburne’s poem.

Instead of smoothly paraphrasing Sappho in English, as he did in “Anactoria,” Swinburne therefore presents the Sapphic fragments more explicitly as translated texts in “On the Cliffs.” The words of Sappho appear in italicized passages, drawing attention to their own textuality even when they appear in the vocative. The first two lines of Sappho’s famous “Ode to Aphrodite,” for example, are repeated several times in italics:

O thou of divers-coloured mind, O thou
Deathless, God’s daughter subtle-souled—lo, now
Now to the song above all songs, in flight
Higher than the day-star’s height,
And sweet as sound the moving wings of night!
Thou of the divers-coloured seat—behold,
Her very song of old!
O deathless, O God’s daughter subtle-souled!
That same cry through this bookage overhead
Rings round reiterated.

(XVII)

The Greek epithet for Aphrodite (reconstructed by scholars as poikilophrón, “possessing a crafty mind” or poikiloθrón, “sitting on a crafted throne”) is translated here several times, to correspond to variant readings of the text: she is “God’s daughter subtle-souled,” a goddess “of divers-coloured mind” on her “divers-coloured seat.” The multiple translations of this single phrase disrupt the continuity of Sappho’s invocation, which is further interrupted by Swinburne’s interpolated comments; he interrupts the vocative “O thou” by writing “lo now / Now to the song above all songs,” and again between the vocatives “Thou” and “O deathless” he inserts the comment, “Behold, / Her very song of old!” These demonstrative exclamations (“lo” and “behold”) direct us to read the italics as the representation of pure voice, while also demonstrating that the repetition of “that same cry” in Swinburne’s poem inevitably takes the form of writing and not singing. At the very moment when Swinburne celebrates Sapphic voice, attempting to bring “her very song of old” into the present tense, he also marks the distance between that song and this poem; we see the repetition of her words made visible on the page, rather than hearing an audible echo.

Insofar as Sappho reappears through textual citation rather than vocal recitation, Swinburne performs the sublime as a citational structure. He apostrophizes Sappho’s apostrophe, taking the words of Sappho out of context and placing them in the context of his own writing. Her words are repeated to refer back to Sappho, self-reflexively, so that she herself becomes as “deathless” and “subtle-souled” as the goddess she once invoked; the meanings of Sappho multiply, like the multiple translations of Aphrodite’s epithet, into a “divers-coloured mind” that takes on the diverse colors of whatever context in which she is reinvoked. Sappho lives on forever through endless permutations and variations, in an infinite series of ever more subtle repetitions: her Sapphic song is an effect of writing, a reiteration and not an original utterance. Swinburne’s Sappho is a cacophonous figure, whose song “heard once on heights Leucadian” is “heard not here / Not here” (XVII). What we cannot hear—ironically echoed in “not here”—is the voice of Sappho, absent from Swinburne’s poem yet nevertheless presented as a series of reflected sounds. The inaudibility of this voice is made visible by Swinburne’s writing, in the very italics he uses to quote Sappho’s words.

To convey the absence of voice, Swinburne translates another Sapphic fragment with interpolated commentary as follows:

I loved thee,—hark, one tenderer note than all—
Athis, of old time, one—one low long fall,
Sighing—one long low lovely loveless call,
Dying—one pause in song so flamingly fast—
Athis, long since in old time overpast—
One soft first pause and last.

(XVIII)

Again we are asked to listen to Sappho—“hark, one tenderer note”—and again this “note” is seen rather than heard; it is marked in italics and presented for us to read. The song, thus written down, is defined by its decline into silence, the “low long fall” of a voice “sighing” and “dying” so that we hear only its cessation, the pauses before and after sound rather than the sound itself: “one soft first pause and last.” Sappho’s song, pre-
Suffering Meter

Swinburne’s Sapphic sublime, I have been arguing, is a revelation of rhythm: in “Anactoria” the Sapphic body is manifested rhythmically throughout the world, and in “On the Cliffs” all time proves to be a manifestation of Sapphic rhythm as well. In “Sapphics” this vision of rhythm takes a metrical form. If Anactoria emerges as the proper name for an allegory of rhythm in “Anactoria,” “Sapphics” goes one step further in formalizing this allegory by naming the meter for which Sappho herself has become the proper name. In his poem Swinburne describes a long tradition of poets who come after Sappho (these poets are “Sapphics”) and they repeat the rhythm of her song (in the meter known as “Sapphics”); furthermore, the title of his poem refers to his own repetition of Sappho’s meter (in stanzas that are “Sapphics,” again). Thus Swinburne aligns himself with a Sapphic tradition, and its line of descent is presented in a visionary sequence: first the appearance of Aphrodite, then a vision of Sappho turning away from the goddess, followed by a vision of her Lesbian song, echoing long after Sappho herself has disappeared. These descending visions do not seem to originate within Swinburne himself but descend upon him in the movement of the verse itself, a cadence that takes the form of the Sapphic stanza. Swinburne’s poem, a dazzling experiment in English “quantitative” meter on a Classical model, therefore appeals simultaneously to the eye and to the ear, attempting to mediate between what is seen and what is heard, and indeed representing one in terms of the other, as if the legible could be made audible and the audible, legible.

At the beginning of “Sapphics,” a Sapphic persona emerges in the dreamlike description of an external force that “beheld me,” taking hold until “a vision came” and “I too was full of the vision.” The agency of this “I” is curiously suspended as Aphrodite, invoked by Sappho in her famous ode, reappears without ever being actively reinvoked. The goddess is mobilized, instead, by the repetition of a Sapphic rhythm compelling her to leave the time and place when Sappho called upon her, to leave the past and move into the future, the present moment of Swinburne’s poem. She approaches, in the cumulative effect of the opening stanzas:

All the night sleep came not upon my eyelids,  
Shed not dew, nor shook nor unclosed a feather,  
Yet with lips shut close and with eyes of iron  
Stood and beheld me.

Then to me so lying awake a vision  
Came without sleep over the seas and touched me,  
Softly touched mine eyelids and lips; and I too,  
Full of the vision,

Saw the white implacable Aphrodite,  
Saw the hair unbound and the feet unsandalled  
Shine as fire of sunset on western waters;  
Saw the reluctant
Feet, the straining plumes of the doves that drew her.
Looking always, looking with necks reverted,
Back to Lesbos, back to the hills whereunder
Shone Mytilene;

Heard the flying feet of the Loves behind her
Make a sudden thunder upon the waters,
As the thunder flung from the strong unclosing
Wings of a great wind.

So the goddess fled from her place, with awful
Sound of feet and thunder of wings around her;
While behind a clamour of singing women
Severed the twilight.

Aphrodite enters the poem as a gradual vision, accompanied by sounds that are gradually amplified into song. At first the vision “touched me, softly” but then it is heard as “sudden thunder upon the waters” and in the “wings of a great wind,” to reveal an awe-inspiring “awful sound” and “clamour of singing.” This amplification may be heard, as well, in the sound effects of Swinburne’s verse, his characteristic use of alliteration and assonance, the echoing repetitions of words and phrases, and the pacing of the language. Moreover, as the poem gathers momentum, its rhythm is figured in Swinburne’s favorite pun on feet. Aphrodite’s “feet unsanded” are shaped to fit into the metrical feet of his poem, moving slowly in the early stanzas (as we see in the stanzaic enjambment of “reluctant / Feet”), but followed in stanza 5 by “the flying feet of the Loves behind her” and then surrounded in stanza 6 by “sound of feet and thunder of wings around her.” Along with its rhetorical amplification, “Sapphics” therefore simultaneously enact and exaggerates a rhythmic acceleration.

The arrival of the goddess is “reluctant,” however, as the poem struggles to set itself into motion. In Sappho’s poem, Aphrodite glides effortlessly into view in a golden chariot, drawn by “beautiful swift sparrows whirring their wings” (*oikes strouthoi . . . fukina dimentes*), but in Swinburne’s poem we hear the double entendre in “the straining plumes of the doves that drew her.” Swinburne is straining to recreate the melody of Sappho in Sapphic stanzas, a vehicle of transport not quite so automatic as Aphrodite’s chariot. The birds in his poem, while carrying the goddess forward in time, are “looking always, looking with necks reverted, / Back to Lesbos.” Their reversion to the past defines “Sapphics” as a recursive structure or self-mirroring vision, as McGann points out: “It is as if Swinburne’s poem were Sappho’s Ode composed and read ‘before a mirror’” (1972: 115). While Sappho calls upon Aphrodite in her ode, in the continuation of Swinburne’s poem it is the goddess who calls upon Sappho: “Yes, by her name too / Called her, saying, ‘Turn to me, O my Sappho.’” This reversal—Aphrodite returns, asking Sappho to return—demonstrates the degree to which Sappho is the proper name for a song already turning inward as its own inversion, reverting back to itself as a reversible reiteration. The song of Sappho is a tautology: “such a song was that song,” we read in line 39, and again in line 66, a mirrored phrase that suggests the difficulty of defining “such a song” except by pointing to “that song.” Therefore the recreation of Sapphic song leaves “all reluctant” (67), silent again in the wake of Sappho; all have “fled from before her” (68) and “all withdrew long since” (69).

Nevertheless Swinburne’s poem tries to envision what Sappho saw and thus to recreate her Sapphic vision. Surpassing the nine Muses, Sappho is “the tenth,” who “sang wonderful things they knew not” (59), and she even turns away from Aphrodite because her music surpasses that of the goddess. She sees her own Lesbian melodies reincarnated in the women of Lesbos:

Saw the Lesbians kissing across their smitten
Lutes with lips more sweet than the sound of lute-strings,
Mouth to mouth and hand upon hand, her chosen,
Fairer than all men;

Only saw the beautiful lips and fingers
Full of songs and kisses and little whispers,
Full of music; only beheld among them
Soar, as a bird soars

Newly fledged, her visible song, a marvel,
Made of perfect sound and exceeding passion,
Sweetly shapen, terrible, full of thunders,
Clothed with the wind’s wings.

Here “the Lesbians” are the instruments for (and of) Sappho’s song. Like Anactoria transformed into “a lyre of many faultless agonies,” their bodies are “lutes with lips more sweet than the sound of lute-strings,” and when they kiss “across their smitten / lutes,” an apt enjambment divides the limbs of the verse in order to compose their limbs into Sappho’s melody. Lesbian body parts are doubled “mouth to mouth and hand upon hand” and multiplied into many “beautiful lips and fingers,” forming a composite body “full of songs” and “full of music”—a song of the body that is also the body of Sapphic song.

Published along with “Anactoria,” “Sapphics” is therefore its compan-
ion piece; both poems use lesbian eroticism as a trope for Lesbian melody (and vice versa) and resuscitate the Sapphic corpus as a living body of song. While Anactoria embodies that song, or rather, serves as the figure for its embodiment, in “Sapphics” it is Sappho herself who emerges as the embodiment of her own poetic form. The vision of Lesbians leads to a revelation of her visible song, a marvel,” taking shape in the contours of the Sapphic stanza, “sweetly shaped” to reveal its own form: the rhythms of Sappho incarnated in Sapphic meter, and reincarnated in the “body” of Swinburne’s poem.

But just as the Sapphic body disintegrates at the end of “Anactoria,” without reintegration into an organically unified form, “Sapphics” simultaneously provokes and revokes an organic reading of poetic form. Sappho’s melody may be figured as embodied song, but it is reconstituted in writing and thus anticipates Swinburne’s vision of Sappho as a form of material inscription in “On the Cliffs.” While there is an emphasis on sound throughout “Sapphics,” culminating in the marvel of a “visible song” that is “made of perfect sound,” the Sapphic stanzas of Swinburne are based on a meter more readily seen than heard: a metrical experiment that follows the quantitative model of Classical Greek verse. To scan Swinburne’s lines on this model, we would mark the long and short syllables that comprise Sappho’s meter in Greek, although strictly speaking such quantities are not audible in English. Swinburne therefore creates a stress-analogue pattern that allows the long syllables in Greek to coincide, more or less, with stressed syllables in English. For example:

Newly fledged, her visible song, a marvel,
Made of perfect sound and exceeding passion,
Sweetly shaped, terrible, full of thunders,
Clothed with the wind’s wings.
(49–60)

In Greek the Sapphic stanza uses a so-called choriamb (long-short-short-long) as its basic unit: three lines (each composed of two trochees, a choriamb, and a bacchiac) are followed by a truncated fourth line (built on another choriamb). However, within an English accentual/syllabic tradition the Sapphic meter may also be understood more simply as three five-stress lines with a fourth half-line at the end of the stanza. The phrase

“newly fledged, her visible song,” for example, could be read according to traditional foot-scansion as two trochees and a choriamb, but we also hear it as a steady alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables according to the conventions of English prosody.

Despite Swinburne’s virtuosity (itself a “marvel”) in creating an English analogy to long and short quantities in Greek, what we hear is their inaudibility. Likewise, in our brief scansion exercise, what we see is a mark of their absence. If Sappho’s “newly fledged” song is recreated in Swinburne’s Sapphic imitation, taking wing in the rhythm of his own fledgling verse, we may hear it (as we heard “the far fall of its fire-fledged rhyme” in “On the Cliffs”) as a question about what it is we are supposed to hear: a falling cadence or a fall into silence? Indeed, the closer Swinburne comes to perfecting the Sapphic stanza, the less audible it becomes, for Sappho’s song can only be made “visible” by the conversion of rhythm into a metrical pattern: a visual representation of meter that seems to be “made of perfect sound,” because it is now without sound. This visualization of Sappho’s song turns her rhythm into an abstract metrical pattern. In English verse, as John Hollander points out, the Sapphic stanza is a formal scheme that functions as a written code: “We must conclude that the quantitative experiment is somewhat like a written code—one needs to count and measure letters in order to determine the system, while the ear will infer that all sorts of accentual patterns it hears are in fact intended to be systematic. Indeed, one mistakes the rhythm of the lines for their schematic meter, which latter is hidden in an arbitrary and arcane system” (1985: 66). On this view the meter of the Sapphic stanza is a graphic phenomenon, a pattern graphically marked for scansion and schematized diagrammatically, as follows:

By graphing the meter, we visualize the song of Sappho and allow it to materialize, in the lines on the page, as a written form that appeals to the eye instead of the ear, an inscription rather than an utterance.

All that remains of Sapphic rhythm, then, is a metrical grid: a ghostly form, or “haunting shape” as Rosanna Warren calls it (205), haunting all poets who follow Sappho. These are the “ghosts of outcast women” that Swinburne describes at the end of his poem:

By the grey sea-side, unassuaged, unheard of,
Unbeloved, unseen in the ebb of twilight,
Ghosts of outcast women return lamenting,
Purged not in Lethe.
Clothed about with flame and with tears, and singing
Songs that move the heart of the shaken heaven,
Songs that break the heart of the earth with pity,
Hearing, to hear them.

The women who "return lamenting" nevertheless return another version of Sapphic song to the world; they are now the "Sapphics" to which Swinburne refers in his title, singing songs that echo everywhere. Their singing moves heaven and earth into a shaken, broken rhythm, an echoic repetition of Sappho; the final line of the poem, "hearing, to hear them" is itself a repetition, to suggest the infinite repeatability of this Sapphic rhythm. These women do not reincarnate Sappho, however, nor do they fully remember her melodies. Unassuaged, unheard of, unbeloved, unseen, they are ghostly figures for the Sapphic song that cannot be re-embodied. "Purged not in Lethe," they do not forget; but instead of remembering Sappho, they repeat the memory of her loss. The song of Sappho therefore survives as a song about Sappho, proclaiming the loss of song rather than reclaiming it. The followers of Sappho, women "unheard of," can be read (as the title "Sapphics" encourages us to do) like the Sapphic meter of Swinburne's poem: less a reincarnation of that form than its spectral emanation, in stanzas that follow in the wake of Sappho and are also unheard, even as we read "hearing, to hear them."

Swinburne's interest in the Sapphic stanza, and his complex use of it as the simultaneous form and content of "Sapphics," can be understood within the context of Victorian metrical theory. A general revival of interest in classical meters influenced the emergence of "the new prosody" in mid-nineteenth-century England; not since Elizabethan experiments in "quantitative" verse had there been such extensive discussion about the possibilities of combining a classical model of meter based on quantity (long and short vowels) with an accentual/syllabic tradition of English poetry based on accent (stressed and unstressed syllables). The systematic elaboration of a quantitative model for English verse extends well beyond the claims of Renaissance prosody, however, and should be historicized as a particularly Victorian phenomenon. A Classical approach to meter reflects a philological turn within nineteenth-century British Classical scholarship and is part of the broader cultural discourse that advocates the return to Classical origins, as Derek Attridge points out: "Only with the new interest in Greece and Rome in the nineteenth century did foot-scansion come into its own as a mode of analysis, accompanied by another round of experiments in English classical meters" (1982: 5).18

By the time Saintsbury published his History of English Prosody in 1910, he could therefore look back on the previous century as a progression toward a new metrical science predicated on the foot. Saintsbury argues with vehemence against the "extravagant accentualism" of Edwin Guest's History of English Rhythms, an influential nineteenth-century treatise (published in 1838, and again in 1882) that is criticized by Saintsbury for its "apodism" (276) or "unfaith in feet" (277). Guest's History is the last gasp of an old English tradition, according to Saintsbury, while his own History traces a different historical tradition that culminates in foot-scansion on a classical model; indeed, he hails Swinburne's poetry as "the triumph of the foot-system" (348). The recurring puns on "feet" that I have been tracing in "Anactoria" and "Sapphics" demonstrate how the foot has become the fetish of Victorian metrical theory. In the context of an argument about figuration in Swinburne's poetry, Armstrong observes how "the fetishising concentration on feet/foot . . . creates a metonymic universe of parts" (1998: 419); we may extend this observation into an argument about meter as well, for to the degree that "literal and figural are, as it were, on equal footing" when we read Swinburne, his metonymic universe of parts also materializes metrically, in the foot.

What Saintsbury assumes to be self-evident—the foot as unit of versification—begins as a debate about the merits of classical scansion, earlier in the nineteenth century. Saintsbury himself acknowledges that Swinburne's metrical triumph "could not have come without the man; but it also could not have come without the hour. That hour was the result of two generations" (337). A classical approach to meter is developed in various treatises over several decades, ranging from The Ancient Rhythmic Art Recovered by William O'Brien (1843) to On the Use of Classical Meters in English by William Johnson Stone (1899). A new edition of Hephaestion's Handbook of Meters (to which we owe a metrical reading of Sappho, as I have already suggested) also came into circulation in 1843, edited by Thomas Foster Barham. This edition includes preludes on the application of rhythm to ancient meters, as well as imitations of Classical meter in English quantitative verse, in an attempt to bring together two different metrical traditions.19

Barham further develops his ideas about Classical prosody in a paper

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18 Attridge offers an introduction to "the classical approach" with the proviso that "it is important to see this approach to metre in its historical context" (1982: 5). While much has

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19 For further examples of classical approaches to meter in the nineteenth century, see Appendix A, "Of Books and Articles Dealing with Quantitative Verse and Pseudo-Classical Poems," in Omond 1968.
“On Metrical Time, or, the Rhythm of Verse, Ancient and Modern,” delivered in 1860 to the Philological Society. Here Barham expresses regret that "all is left to the untutored ear" in the reading of poetry, both ancient and modern, and attempts a more scholarly exploration of "the principles of rhythm" manifested in various metrical forms. Barham singles out the Sapphic stanza in particular ("the first shall be that beautiful and well-known system named the Sapphic," he writes), and proposes a rhythmic reading that would group the stanza into three lines instead of four.20 Citing the first stanza of Fragment 31 as an example, he concludes, "With this rhythm, the effect of the metre is certainly different from our ordinary mode of reading, but, as it seems to me, it is preferable" (1860: 61). The certainty of his reading is qualified, however, by the phrase "as it seems to me," a perhaps unwitting translation of the words just quoted from Sappho's fragment (phainetai moi), and suggesting how much is rendered uncertain by the reading of rhythm through foot scansion: can we really hear the rhythm Barham discerns in the Sapphic stanza, even with a well-tutored ear? Or does it only seem audible? The dilemma anticipates Swinburne's representation of that which is inaudible in "Sapphics," as if to revive the lost form much admired by Barham and his contemporaries. Such critics urge the revival of classical meters, despite the difficulty of reconstructing their rhythm; indeed, Classical versification is considered a productive model for English poetry precisely because it departs "from our ordinary mode of reading."

These are questions hovering in the air, during the decades of the nineteenth century when Swinburne was being tutored in prosody, and in his own verse he responds to the new theories of meter. I would argue, in fact, that Swinburne's early metrical experiments are a response to Coventry Patmore's "Essay on English Metrical Law" in particular. First published

20 Barham argues that while the Sapphic system is "technically termed epichoriastic," the verses are formed "essentially of dactyls and trochees [sic]; and as originally written by the poetess, would seem to have been intended for three lines only, the two former trimeters, and the last a tetrameter." The example he offers looks like this (with alternating marks for "arist" and "thesis"): 

Φάνεται λοιπόν τὸν θείον

Ιδοίει, καὶ πλακόν ἀδῷ φωνίκας ἔραμοντες.

Needless to say, Barham's metrical notation is idiosyncratic and not further developed in either his century or our own, although now classical scholars do share his skepticism about a "choriastic" base for the Sapphic stanza and agree that the third and fourth lines might be joined more plausibly into one longer line; see Haldorn, Oswald, and Rosenmeyer 1980: 29ff.

in 1857 as a review of various English metrical critics (including Guest on the history of English rhythms, and O'Brien on the recovery of ancient rhythms), this essay was known and avidly read within the circle of Oxford poets, at the time when Swinburne was also a student there.21 In the essay Patmore develops the Classical approach to meter according to a new prosody that would mediate between the "metrical" or "temporal" model of Latin and Greek verse, and the "rhythmic" or "accentual" model of English verse. While he concedes that "a real change did occur in the transition from the 'metrical' to the 'rhythmic' of the moderns" and further admits that "in modern verse, those collocations of accented and unaccented syllables which we call 'feet,' are not true measures" (19–20), nevertheless he devises a scheme that retains the foot as the measurement of "isochronous intervals." Thus he recuperates the possibility for measurement without insisting on the actual or hypothetico-quantitative idea of what is measured: "Time measured implies something that measures, and is therefore itself unmeasured," he concludes emphatically, in italics (15). Patmore's paradigm for prosodic analysis (perhaps less original than he claims it to be) depends on a basic "ictus" that divides verse into a series of regular intervals. The division of time is here figured in spatial terms: "The fact of that division shall be made manifest by an 'ictus' or 'beat,' actual or mental, which is placed in a chain railing, shall mark the end of one space, and the commencement of another. This 'ictus' is the acknowledged condition of all possible metre" (15). On this account all meter, both ancient and modern, is a function of marking. The ictus marks intervals "like a post in a chain railing," simultaneously marking the end of one space and the beginning of another, but without itself taking up time or space. We perceive the spaces between, rather than the mark itself. While the ictus allows meter to materialize, "it has no material and external existence at all," Patmore insists, again in italics (15); it is the process of marking rather than the mark itself. What appears to be a practical lesson in prosody therefore leads Patmore into the more startling insight that meter might be a form of material inscription.

21 Sister Mary Roth's critical edition presents the original text of Patmore's essay (originally entitled "English Metrical Critics" and published in the North British Review in August of 1857) along with later revisions (titled "Prefatory Study on English Metrical Law" in 1876 and retitled "Essay on English Metrical Law" for Patmore's collated Poems of 1879, and subsequent editions). I refer to the 1857 version, as it circulated in Oxford during Swinburne's student years at Balliol (1856–60). Stobie discusses the early reception of Patmore's essay within "the Oxford set" (1949: 65), which surely would have included Swinburne, although she does not mention him by name. See also Roth's commentary on Patmore for further discussion of his influence on contemporary poets and critics interested in "the new prosody."
This insight is framed, however, by an equally insistence emphasis on an organic theory of prosody, derived in part from Hegel in the opening pages of Patmore's essay. Paraphrasing Hegel's Aesthetics on the increasing “spiritualisation” of language, Patmore defines meter as the necessary “corporeal element” within language: “Art must have a body as well as a soul, and the higher and purer the spiritual, the more powerful and unmistakable should be the corporeal element;—in other words the more vigorous and various the life, the more stringent and elaborate must be the law by obedience to which life expresses itself” (7). Meter manifests the corporeality of language in order to counterbalance its tendency toward “the spiritual,” but it can do so only by means of an increasingly “stringent and elaborate” law. The imposition of this metrical law is another form of inscription, allowing the “body” of language to materialize through the marking of meter. Thus Patmore's philosophical justification for meter produces the figure of a body and makes possible an organic reading of poetic form, even while his detailed analysis of meter points in the opposite direction, to a “more stringent” formalism.

Throughout the essay Patmore describes a perpetual conflict “between the law of the verse and the freedom of the language” (9) in rather disciplinarian terms that conflate submission to the laws of meter with an almost painful disciplining of the body. The bonds of verse are the necessary “shackles of artistic form,” and “the language should always seem to feel, though not to suffer from the bonds of verse,” he writes (8). Moreover, poets themselves should also be made to feel these bonds; at a time when most poets “know nothing and feel nothing of the laws of meter” (50), Patmore insists on the difficult discipline of Classical meters, a formal regimen to which all poets should submit. A slip from “should” to “must” resonates through the essay, as it preaches obedience to the metrical law that it elaborates over many pages, and concludes with a stern warning: even when poetry appears to be “unconscious of the rules,” it requires “years of intensely conscious discipline,” and young poets in particular “must have the addition of hard discipline” to their inspiration (49).

Swinburne seems to follow Patmore’s advice more literally than intended, as he is quick to turn the bonds of verse into a bondage that he would only too willingly suffer. He associates the hard discipline of meter with the even harder discipline of corporal punishment, as we have already seen in the Sapphic scene of instruction, and throughout his private correspondence his early instruction in classical meters is associated with scenes of flogging. In one letter Swinburne describes himself flogged for attempting to write in Galliambics, a “hard” meter that led to a hard beating from his tutor; remembering this painful episode, he writes that nothing can “heal the cuts or close the scars which had imprinted on the mind and body . . . a just horror of strange metres” (Letters I: 110). And yet in the compulsive counting and recounting of his boyhood floggings, these cuts and scars also account for Swinburne's metrical virtuosity. Swinburne remembers the flogging as a form of rigorous inscription: what has been “imprinted on the mind and body” by flagellation is the experience of meter itself as a painful pleasure, playing out the “ictus” (perfect participle of the Latin ictus, “to strike”) on the body, and leaving its marks there. The rhythmic beating of his body becomes Swinburne’s preferred figure for “the function of marking” that Patmore attributes to English meter. The marks left on his body allow it to materialize as a function of meter and make it legible as the body of a poet who has learned his lesson in prosody: a perverse performance of English metrical law that makes the language seem both to feel and to suffer from the bonds of verse.

Thus in another letter, Swinburne claims to surpass even Tennyson because of his education in the “rule of rhythm” at Eton: “As to my quantities and metre and rule of rhythm and rhyme, I defy castigation. The head master has sent me up for good on that score. Mr. Tennyson tells me in a note that he “envies me” my gift that way. After this approval I will not submit myself to the birch on that account” (Letters I: 121). Although Swinburne claims he “will not submit to the birch” again, it is precisely by submitting to its rule that he has a “gift” for verse—not freely given, but strictly imposed by the headmaster at school. His memories of Eton (more hyperbolical than historical, one suspects) take the form of numerous flagellation fantasies, focusing in particular on the body of the boy being birched. From his friend George Powell, for example, he requests “a little dialogue (imaginary) between schoolmaster and boy—from the first summons . . . to the last cut” with a special plea to “describe also the effect of each stripe on the boy's flesh—it appears between cuts” (Letters I: 123). The boy is disciplined by an imaginary beating, in a violent inscription that far exceeds Patmore's account of meter yet repeats its logic: just as the “ictus” marks the end of one interval and the beginning of the next, allowing us to perceive the spaces in between, so also Swinburne emphasizes the marking function of the “beat,” not only in terms of the marks it leaves behind (the cuts and stripes) but also “its appearance between cuts,” its metrical pattern.

Flagellation proves a necessary initiation rite for poets, as we see not only in Swinburne's private correspondence but also in his flagellant verse, and perhaps most strikingly in The Flogging Block, a series of twelve
unpublished "eclogues" in a mock-pastoral Eolian setting.23 In the Prologue to this "Heroic" poem, Swinburne invokes "the Muse who presides over the Ceremony of Flagellation" to teach the budding young poet a lesson in rhythm:

Chief the Stripling Songster's Breeches invites
The full Performance of thy frequent Rites,
Most the Nurturing of the Muse require
The light that sets their lyre on Fire,
The light that ever when they cry keeps Time,
When Stroke to Stroke responds in glowing Rhyme.
And still the humbled Bottom bares the Rod sublime,
Till Heart & Head the rhythmic Lesson learn
From Wounds that redden & from Stripes that burn,
As Twig by Twig imparts the Crimson sign in turn.

The "rhythmic lesson" is enforced by each lash, teaching the "Stripling Songster" to cry in time and respond "stroke by stroke ... in glowing Rhyme." This rhythmic response is incorporated into the body, and imprinted on the bottom as a "Crimson sign," making the body legible through the marking of meter. The passage resonates, of course, with "Anactoria," where the body of Anactoria is rhythmized by Sappho, who strikes "pang from pang as note is struck from note" in order to turn her into the very embodiment of Sapphic meter. Swinburne's whipping muse is therefore invoked as another version of Sappho: a mistress of perverse metrical discipline, wielding "the Rod sublime" in order to teach the fine art of suffering meter.

Swinburne's (per)version of Sappho reflects ironically on an image created by nineteenth-century Classical scholars of Sappho as chaste schoolmistress and leads directly into the underworld of Victorian pornography, where flagellating governesses taught young gentlemen a good lesson.24 Swinburne's poetry did, in fact, circulate in such circles. John Camden Hotten, the rather shady publisher who took over the distribution of Poems and Ballads, also offered a special line of books devoted to flagellation, with tempting titles like The Sublime of Flagellation, Exhibition of Female Flagellants, Lady Buntick's Revels, and Madame Birchiniti's Dance.25 The last

of these features an anonymous parody of Sappho, attributed to a boarding-school girl who has "just been corrected by her Governess." In the opening stanza, the sublime of flagellation is not so far removed from Swinburne's Sapphic sublime:

Curst as the meanest wretch is she
Th'unlucky girl just whipt by thee,
Who sees and feels thy stinging rage,
Which sought but time can e'er assuage.26

The beating of the birch is repeated in the beat of the poem, and its "stinging rage" has the same impact on the unluckily girl as Sappho (whose verses, we recall, "strike and sting") on Swinburne. Swinburne's Sapphic sublime does not work on this level of parody, however; when we place it within the broader discourse of Victorian "flagellomaniac," we see how closely his "aesthetic" and "pornographic" writings are linked to the formal question of meter.

There is an obvious correspondence between the sublime sadomasochism of "Anactoria" and Swinburne's flagellant verse, but the more abstract formalization of meter in "Sapphics" also corresponds to passages in The Flogging Block. In the eclogue entitled "Algernon's Flogging," we see how a body materializes through meter, like the "visible song" of Sappho. The rigorous disciplining of Algeron strikes his body into musical response, and he cries out his pain in perfect lyric meters while a chorus of schoolboys traces the mark of the birch on his back. "Oh, isn't his bottom a pattern when stripped?" one observer with relish, to which another replies, "You can see the rod's marks all down Algeron's back." Disciplined by rhythm and marked by meter, Algeron becomes legible in the stripes and lines left by the flogging on his body. Indeed, these lines are written into Swinburne's manuscript. Three parallel lines that mark the end of the eclogue, at the bottom of the page, also appear to re-mark the lines on Algeron's bottom (figure 8):

23 The Flogging Block: An Heroic Poem in a Prologue and Twelve Eclogues by Algeron Charles Swinburne, with illustrations by Simeon Solomon. The original holograph manuscript, written at intervals between 1862 and 1881, is in the British Museum (Ashley Ms. 9256).
24 The nineteenth-century emergence of "Sappho schoolmistress" is traced by Parker 1993, for discussion of "the English vice," see Gibson 1978.
25 These titles are included in the "Library Illustrative of Social Progress," attributed to "Henry Thomas Bucque" and dated "London, 1770," but printed in 1872 by Hotten. See Ashbee 1962: 239.
26 The poem appears as "Parody of Sappho's Celebrated Ode" in Madame Birchiniti's Dance: A Modern Tale with Considerable Additions and Original Anecdotes, in Hotten's "Library Illustrative of Social Progress," vol. 3: 51–52 [see above, n. 94]. Of course the attribution of the poem to "a child eight years of age, but remarkable quick" is spurious; the author is unknown. It is worth noting here that Hotten did solicit anonymous flagellant verse from Swinburne in the late sixties and early seventies, for publication in his "special" series: indeed in his preface to Swinburne's Letters (I: xxiii), Lang notes that Swinburne was blackmailed by Hotten into collaborating on books like The Romance of Chastisement and Flagellation and the Flagellants, both published by Hotten in 1870 (Letters II: 1–2, 227–28).
between meter and masochism that Pinch further traces in a broader nineteenth-century discourse on corporal punishment and aesthetic education. What distinguishes Swinburne from his Romantic precursors is his insistence on that masochistic relation, pushing excitement beyond its proper bounds—beyond a Wordworthian reading of meter—into an undue proportion of pain.

Suffering meter is part of the "poetics of passion" in all of Swinburne's poetry, as Anthony Harrison reminds us: "Swinburne never forgot the etymological origins of the word 'passion' from the Greek pathos and the Latin passio, meaning suffering," and Swinburne's interest in "passionate experience" must therefore be understood in terms of self-loss rather than self-assertion, as the expression of suffering (1982: 696–97). I would go one step further, to suggest that what we read as passionate expression in Swinburne is the passion of meter itself: a pathos not inherent in the utterance of a lyric subject, but in subjection to a formal principle. Subjected to metrical law, Swinburne relinquishes control and surrenders to compulsory form, allowing it to speak for him or through him, as if possessed. His passion of meter is an even more extreme example of the "lyric possession" that Susan Stewart discovers in other poets who "employ redundant rhyme and meter as a means of representing the transport or waylaying of subjective intention," for "they demonstrate that we cannot necessarily conclude that strict form signifies authorial mastery or control; it as readily can signify the submission of will within convention." (1995: 40). This form of lyric possession is a dispossession of the lyric subject, although Stewart is reluctant to give up a claim to the lyric subject altogether: by reading the "symptoms of meter," she describes various displacements of reference (the waylaying of subjective intention, the surrendering of will, the haunting of lyric voice), but with reference to a model of the unconscious that still assumes an individual consciousness.

But suppose, as is the case with Swinburne, that meter is not to be read symptomatically, as if it were the return of the repressed, but as the manifestation of a highly self-conscious nineteenth-century discourse on meter? By suffering meter, Swinburne "consciously" performs a formal structure that does not operate according to an intentional logic: in his poetry, rhythm is an automatic mechanism, a repetition compulsion that

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27 This backward logic of lyric reading is further discussed in my forthcoming essay, "On The Flogging Block: Algernon Swinburne"; see also "A Poem Is Being Written" (Sedgwick 1995: 177–214).
takes control and makes authorial mastery redundant. Edward Thomas recognizes how Swinburne's "confessed experiments in sapphics" disclaim agency: "He does not, like another poet, have to think in his meter; his mastery compels the metre to think for him" (1912: 87–88). Likewise, in an 1889 review of "Mr. Swinburne," Oscar Wilde is interested in "the masterly experiments" of Swinburne's poetry precisely because he seems to have relinquished mastery: "It has been said of him, and with truth, that he is a master of language, but with still greater truth it may be said that Language is his master. Words seem to dominate him" (146). Swinburne appears to be a master of language because language has mastered him. Indeed, by capitalizing "Language" Wilde cannily displaces the proper name of Mr. Swinburne, who is no longer the proper subject of his own poetry; Swinburne's claim to lyricism can only be the surrendering of that lyric persona. "He is the first lyric poet who has tried to make an absolute surrender of his own personality, and he has succeeded," Wilde writes, not without ambivalence; "We hear the song, but we never know the singer. We never even get near him" (148).

Of course that is also how Swinburne describes his relation to Sappho, as we recall: "It is as near as I can come; and no man can come close to her," he writes in "Notes on Poems and Reviews," not only to defend his imitations of Sappho, but to imply that he might at least approximate her very condition of unapproachability: no longer a singer but a song, or rather, its reiteration. The reception of his own poetry is therefore a repetition of Swinburne's Sapphic sublime. Mastered by Sappho and subjected to a Sapphic rhythm, Swinburne is nevertheless admired for his mastery of meter. Saintsbury calls him "the one living master of English prosody" (1910: 334) and upon his death in 1909, Swinburne is eulogized in the obituaries as "an unrivaled master of meter" (Hyder 1970: 242). By the time his Posthumous Poems appeared in 1917, the reviewers proclaim that he "the great singer was indeed singing for our age" (ibid.: 252), but only in the past tense: a posthumous recuperation of Swinburne, as if he might have been, after all, the Victorian reincarnation of Sappho, whose song also outlived the age of her singing. Thus Swinburne's poetic corpus is constituted, by analogy to the mutilated fragments of Sappho, as a body of writing initially abused by critics but increasingly read as the very embodiment of lyric poetry; a sublime metrical body, suffering meter.

Recollections of Swinburne

Swinburne's perverse reincorporation of "the mutilated fragments" of Sappho leaves us with a question about how to read Swinburne "himself." In the course of his reception, he is increasingly identified with Sappho, according to a logic that repeats Swinburne's Sapphic sublime. In an early review, one of the few to defend Poems and Ballads, W. M. Rossetti reinstates the sublime as an aesthetic category for reading Swinburne: "There is a word which was once familiar to the critic of poetry—the word Sublime; now seldom produced, and still seldom aright producible," he writes. Without "attempting a definition of that word Sublime," Rossetti nevertheless insists that Swinburne deserves the epithet. His praise of Swinburne is fursome, in a prolonged sentence gradually building up to "that word":

We find in him an impulse, a majesty, a spontaneity, a superiority to common standards of conception, perception, and treatment, an absoluteness (so to speak) of poetic incitement and subject-matter (rendering him perhaps not likely to be ever very widely admired, but certain to be as intimately and as enthusiastically admired at the latest date to which his works may reach as at the present or any intermediate time), and with a power and splendour in all the media of poetic expression, a wizardry over the auroral brightness and the "sunless and sonorous gulf" of song, such as we apprehend to be consistent if not co-extensive with any reasonable definition of the poetic sublime. (Hyder 1970: 89–90)

Superior to "common standards of conception, perception, and treatment," achieving an "absoluteness" that recalls the "literal and absolute words" of Sappho, flying high over the "gulf of song," Swinburne is elevated—in the cadences of Rossetti's own high Victorian prose—to the status of sublime poet, in the present and in future time.

But if Swinburne appears "consistent if not co-extensive with any reasonable definition of the poetic sublime," the reason is that he extends the sublime beyond its reasonable limits. Throughout his review Rossetti describes Swinburne in distinctly Longinian terms, with a giddy sense of the poetry veering out of control: "a mighty intoxication of poetic diction mounts to his head, and pours in an unruly torrent through his lips, and he forgets the often still nobler office of self-mastery and reticence" (64). The unruly torrent of Swinburne, intoxicated by language that "mounts to his head," makes him sublime; yet this sublimating movement also makes him lose "self-mastery," as he is transported by a force that carries him upward and, at times, too high. "The author's defects," Rossetti concedes, "will be perceived to be ascribable to over-high, not to deficient pitch, and as such to be rightly classed under the terms perversion and excess rather than blunder and bathos" (89). Rossetti therefore introduces a Longinian account of the sublime ("now seldom produced, and still seldom aright producible") in order to demonstrate how Swinburne might produce the sublime, but only by reproducing it in extreme form, not "aright" but "rightly classed under the terms perversion and ex-
Swinburne's flagrant disarticulation of the body makes him the most controversial, and perhaps most influential, poet of the eighteen sixties. Every attack on Swinburne only serves to perpetuate that abuse, and even Swinburne's self-defense in "Notes on Poems and Reviews" is a provocation to further abuse. "I have never hustled after the praise of reviewers; I have never feared their abuse," he writes in response to the scathing reviews of "Anactoria" (19), but as a concession to his critics he adds, "I am ready for once to play the anatomist." Swinburne then proceeds to anatomize "Anactoria" as a poem that cannot reproduce the Sapphic body, and throughout the essay he ironically dissects his poetic corpus to show how it "embodies" ideas that refuse organic reading. The disintegrating and unnatural bodies of Poems and Reviews, he argues perversely, are repulsive only to readers who insist on their embodiment.

Nevertheless Swinburne depends on such readers not only because their outrage contributes to his visibility as poet (Poems and Ballads became a best-seller), but because the violence of their attacks turns him into another body for abuse: a body of writing that is read as "sin burning on the paper," the mark of a man whose name has gone into circulation as "Swine-born," a poet whose lyric signature is the abuse of the body (Letters I: xxxi-xiii). Of course Swinburne, "more be-written and believed than any man since Byron," or so he claims in a letter (Letters III: 12), finds a painful pleasure in proclaiming how abused he is by the critics. Not surprisingly, he turns their critical castigation into a series of flagellation fantasies. In a letter of 1867, after the relentless whipping that Poems and Ballads received in the press, Swinburne writes that he is "mentally in the same condition as the skin of a public schoolboy after the twentieth or thirtieth application of the birch—too well used to it for any cut of a master's rod to make the tough hide wince" (Letters I: 217). And in an earlier letter to Lord Hougham, signed "your much flogged pupil," there is reference to the flogging Swinburne has received from colleagues and critics: "Tennyson and Jowett, the Athenæum and the Spectator, have each had their innings. Twice I have been swished in private and twice in public before the whole school—for 'irreverence.' My skin has the marks of the birch still on it" (Letters I: 121-22). Both letters point to the imprinting of a lyric sign on the body, as we also saw in Swinburne's flagellant verse, but the marking function is now attributed to the critics who abuse Swinburne: his skin is only "too well used" to their cuts and "has the marks of the birch still on it." Thus Swinburne predicts how he will be read by posterity: the more he is castigated by the critics, the more marks they leave behind, and the more he materializes as a poetic corpus.

Because the lyric figure of Swinburne appears through this process of disfiguration, he is easily caricatured. Rikky Rooksby surveys a century of Swinburne criticism, ranging from Ruskin's description of Swinburne as...
“demonic youth” to the “tadpole scholar” that Church describes “leaping on and off chairs ‘like a wild creature,’ ‘a syllable-addict, a word-drunkard,’” and continuing in more recent descriptions of Swinburne as “a small red-headed, bird-voiced eccentric of aristocratic lineage,” a “besotted logophile” and a “strident red-headed imp” (Rooksby and Shrimpton 1995: 8–9). To this exaggerated portrait Rooksby wishes to restore “historical significance and human content” (9). But what makes Swinburne significant is precisely the history of his transmission, the distortion of his characteristic features into a poetic body that is no longer human, not only by those who abuse Swinburne but even more by those who admire him as lyric poet par excellence. The parts of Swinburne’s body repeatedly singled out by critics—“his aureole of flaming red hair, his feverishly dancing limbs and perpetually fluttering hands” (Quennell, quoted by Rooksby 8)—are decomposed and recomposed on a Longinian model without producing an organically unified form.

The peculiar pathos, or bathos, of this sublime logic is comically illustrated by Max Beerbohm in various cartoons of Swinburne, and especially in “The Small Hours in the ‘Sixties at 16, Cheyne Walk—Algernon reading ‘Anactoria’ to Gabriel and William” (figure 9).20 Algernon sits by candlelight in the small hours of the night, looking small himself and strangely out of sync with the company to whom he is reciting his poem. In contrast to the looming bearded William Rossetti and the reclining corpulence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, he is a tiny upright body with foreshortened arms, spindly legs and extended feet, an oversized head on a swan-like neck: in short, a lyricized figure who seems to reincarnate the loose limbs of Sappho in the act of performing his own Sapphic song.

In another portrait, this time in words, Beerbohm also represents Swinburne as an oddly disproportionate body. He recalls visits to the elderly poet in “No. 2, The Pines,” with an elaborate description of his physical appearance. “Here, suddenly visible in the flesh, was the legendary being and divine singer,” he reminisces, but this vision of Swinburne in the flesh is quickly transfigured into “a strange small figure in grey . . . being of an aspect so unrelated as it was to any species of human kind” (Hyder 1970: 237). There is indeed something unhuman about Swinburne, who cuts a strange figure in Beerbohm’s description: “In figure, at first glance, he seemed almost fat; but this was merely because of the way he carried himself; with his long neck strained so tightly back that he

20 Beerbohm includes this caricature of Swinburne (as well as “Algernon Swinburne taking his Great New Friend Guse to see Gabriel Rossetti,” in which Swinburne is a diminutive figure alongside the towering Guse) in Rossetti and His Circle (London: Heinemann, 1922) and reprinted in 1987 by N. John Hall. In an introductory note, Beerbohm warns his readers “not to regard as perfectly authentic any of the portraits that I here present to you.”

all receded from the waist upwards. . . . I became aware, too, that when he bowed he did not unbend his back, but only his neck—the length of the neck accounting for the depth of the bow. His hands were tiny, even for his size, and they fluttered helplessly, touchingly, unceasingly” (237–38). As in Beerbohm’s cartoon, we see the legendary Swinburne dissolving into “the divine singer,” a body losing all natural proportions, with his long neck “strained” back so that he is “all receded from the waist upwards,” leaving us with the image of hands that never stop fluttering, more like a bird than a human being. His body seems possessed, taken over by a voice not his own, as he “threw back his head, uttering a sound that was like the cooing of a dove, and forthwith, rapidly, ever so musically, he spoke to us” (239). The “helplessly, touchingly, unceasingly” fluttering hands prepare us for Swinburne’s utterance, delivered “rapidly” and “musically” as if to transpose the movement of his limbs into pure melody, for Beerbohm hastens to add, “And rather than that he spoke would I say that he cooingly and flutteringly sang . . . in a flow of words as spontaneous as the wordless notes of a bird in song.” This portrait of Swinburne as a body spontaneously given over to song, the very embodiment of lyric, was written at the request of Edmund Gosse, for inclusion in his
biography. In an apologetic note, Beerbohm admits he took refuge in "a
reminiscent essay," because "I failed in the attempt to make of my sub-
ject a snapshot that was not a grotesque." But any attempt Beerbohn
makes to portray Swinburne—in caricature, vignette, or memoir—seems
to border on the grotesque, as if remembering Swinburne inevitably in-
volved a dismemberment, the deformation of his body.

Probably Beerbohm was influenced by Edmund Gosse, whose Life of
Swinburne (1917) also portrays the poet as an idealized lyric figure, al-
though not without mockery. There is more than a hint of the grotesque,
indeed, in Gosse's supplementary "notes" to the biography.30 In this no-
torious essay, entitled "Swinburne's Agitation," Gosse describes Swin-
burne as a poet who

under the agitation of his own thoughts became like a man possessed, with
quivering hands, eyes thrown up, and voice hollowed to a kind of echoing
chant. This strange possession was entirely unconscious. . . . His eyes would
be fixed on nothingness, his lips alone would be moving without a sound:
until occasional tremors through his limbs would presently announce that
he was waking up to speech. Then he would begin in a very low voice, still
not looking at me, with some such sentence as "Down all the vista of liter-
tary history it is impossible to see a figure, etc. etc." almost as though he were
reading out of a book; and then he would turn to recite with an almost ex-
cruciating ardour some lines of Aeschylus or Marlowe, or a French lyric.
(Letters VI: 238–34)

Again the quivering hands, the trembling limbs, the echoing voice turn
Swinburne into "a man possessed," no longer himself but taken over by
rhythm. His agitation is played out on the body like the rhythms of eros
lusinades, first with "occasional tremors through his limbs," then "waking
up to speech" and gradually elevating a "very low voice" to a high pitch
of "almost excruciating ardour," to express his lyric passion. During "this
strange possession" Swinburne seems to embody the very idea of the lyric
poet; the figures "impossible to see" down the vista of literary history may
be heard again in his own echoing chant, as he recites other poets "as
though he were reading out of a book," except that he has memorized
their words and now incorporated them into his own body. The agitation
of Swinburne, who seeks to reincarnate the rhythms of lyric poetry, may
therefore be understood as a form of sublime transport.

30 Gosse drafted his supplementary notes on Swinburne in 1917 after the appearance
of his biography, but without publishing the essay. Nevertheless, it circulated enough to be-
come a source of controversy. Lang alludes to "all the hogger mugger with which this essay
has been surrounded and all the bullabaloo with which it has been heralded" (Letters I: 6vi-
dix) and prints the essay for the first time as an appendix to his edition of the Swinburne
correspondence (Letters VI: 238–48).

At the same time, Gosse reveals another side of Swinburne’s agitation,
the physical "irregularities" that he feels called upon to describe as "a duty
to posterity." "I have therefore decided to write down, with closest at-
tention to the truth as I recall it, or have been able to collect it, the physical
characteristics of this extraordinary man," Gosse writes, going on at
length to describe how Swinburne abused his body, in sensational details
left out of the official biography: his "bout of abandonment to drink," and
delirium tremens) (242), the "ecstatic pleasure in letting his mind
rest on flagellation" and his "mania for suffering pain" (244), and various
incidents demonstrating "the excessive tension of Swinburne’s nerves"
(247). By "collecting" these pieces of information, and thus recollecting
a body that is conspicuously falling apart, Gosse repeats the pattern of
Swinburne’s Sapphic sublime: the loosening of limbs (whether by "occa-
sional tremors," "delirium tremens," or any other version of eros lusinades)
allows Gosse to remember Swinburne as a lyric poet and to reinte-
grate his poetry into a posthumous poetic corpus. Gosse becomes the first in a
long line of Swinburne “collectors”; in addition to collecting memories and
memorabilia for his Life of Swinburne, he collected unpublished mate-
rials for Swinburne’s Posthumous Poems (1917) and Letters (1918), and
together with Wise he published the collected works of Swinburne in the
twenty-volume Bonchurch edition (1925–27). But in reassembling the
poetic corpus so successfully, Gosse also succeeds in making the poet look
less and less complete; the Complete Works are anything but, as Roosby
points out (1993: 2), and the Bonchurch edition leaves so much to be de-
sired that it stimulates a desire for ever more of Swinburne.

The desire to turn Swinburne into a body of writing therefore both as-
sumes and resums a process of fragmentation; not unlike Sappho, it
would seem that Swinburne can only be recollected in scattered parts.
Even Mrs. Disney Leith, Swinburne’s first cousin who, according to Gosse,
"constituted herself the protector of his memory," and contributed to "a
sort of conspiracy that Algernon should be presented to posterity as a
guileless and featureless model of respectability" (236–37), recollects
Swinburne in bits and pieces. Her recollections of the poet (published in
1917 as The Boyhood of Algeron Charles Swinburne: Personal Recollec-
tions by his Cousin, Mrs. Disney Leith, With Extracts from Some of his Private Letters) are
presented in the form of excerpted letters and extracts from diaries, partial
narratives that circulate as apocryphal fictions in subsequent biogra-
phies of Swinburne. One event in particular ("I cannot call it a remin-
scence," she writes, "for I do not remember hearing of it at the time, or,
indeed for long after," 13) demonstrates how Swinburne’s afterlife is like
the fragmentary legacy of Sappho; this story, not quite a memory, serves
as parable for the remembering of Swinburne through an increasingly vi-
olent dismemberment.
Immediately after describing his most striking physical features, his habit of "shaking his arms and hands when animated" and his "airy and very agile...figure" (which she insists is "quite in proportion," while conceding that his head gave "perhaps the appearance of being large for his small stature," 12–13), Mrs. Leith recounts how Swinburne once endangered himself as a boy by climbing Culver Cliff. To describe his heroic climb of that "great white chalk promontory...unassailable to ordinary mortals," she quotes at length from a letter, in his own words:

I found myself at the foot of Culver Cliff; and then all at once it came upon me that it was all very well to fancy or dream of "deadly danger"...but that there was a chance of testing my nerve in face of death which could not be surpassed. So I climbed a rock under the highest point, and stripped, and climbed down again, and just took a soure into the sea to steady and strengthen my nerves, which I knew the sharp chill would, and climbed up again...But as I got near the top I remember thinking I should not like to have 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 almost above me. Even a real sea-gull could not have worked its way up without using or spreading its wings. So of course I felt I must not stop to think for one second, and began climbing down, hand under hand, as fast and as steadily as I could, till I reached the bottom, and (equally of course) began to look out for another possible point of ascent at the same height. As I began again I must own 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, and there would not be much of me to pick up. (14–15)

Swinburne's ascent to the top part of the precipice is clearly a sublime narrative (or "top story"), dramatizing his aspiration to Longinian heights, and allowing the fledgling poet (like the sea-gull with whom he identifies) to spread his wings. The deadly danger would seem to be the vision of himself shatter at the foot of the cliff, "in a fragmentary condition" without "much of me to pick up," the conversion of "I" into "it," a disembodied body, a fragment.

Yet as the letter continues, this is the fate that Swinburne envisions. When he finally reaches the top of the cliff, the height of his ascent can be measured only by imagining a fall down into the depths: "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—as suddenly and utterly and painlessly as I did many years afterward when I was "picked up at sea" by a Norman fishing boat upwards of three miles (they told me) off the coast of Etratat and could just clutch hold of the oar they held out; "but that is not in this story"—which I only hope is not too long for the reader" (16). Told in retrospect, the story of climbing the cliff anticipates a later story of near-drowning, and through this temporal manipulation the letter begins to sound less autobiographical and more like another version of Swinburne's Sapphic sublime. The episode on Culver Cliff repeats Sappho's leap from the Leucadian 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. This fantasy of self-fragmentation identifies Swinburne with the figure of Sappho, and the legacy of her leap becomes his own, as Mrs. Leith writes effusively about "the halo of association that will surround Culver Cliff for ever, at least as long as Swinburne's name is remembered!" (17). Swinburne's name, in other words, can be remembered because his body is absorbed into the larger body of the sea, allowing Swinburne to be read (much as we read Sappho's Sappho) as a figure that appears and disappears in the rhythms of its own scattering.

Such is the "halo of association" that allows Arthur Symons to rediscover the rhythms of the sea in Swinburne's poetry. In *Figures of Several Centuries* (1916), he singles out Swinburne as the most exemplary lyric figure of the previous century, for "to no poet has it been given to create music with words in so literal an analogy with the inflexible and vital rhythmical science of the sea" (1916: 158). The analogy between Swinburne's metrical virtuosity and the "rhythmical science of the sea" serves to naturalize the rhythm of his poetry; Swinburne now seems to dissolve into a larger force of nature, just as Sappho dissolves into a Sapphic rhythm that is repeated throughout the world at the end of "Anactoria" and penetrates all time at the end of "On the Cliffs." Symons literalizes the topos of Swinburne's Sapphic sublime by locating the scene of reading at the seaside: "Reading the earlier and the later Swinburne on a high rock around which the sea is washing, one is struck by the way in which these cadences, in their unending, ever-varying flow, seem to harmonize with the rhythm of the sea. Here one finds, at least, and it is a great thing to find, a rhythm inherent in nature" (161). The "high rock around which..."
the sea is washing" may refer to the Leucadian Cliff where Sappho took the plunge, or to Culver Cliff where Swinburne imagines a similar fate, but it is also where Symons as reader finds himself, literally or figuratively, when he reads the verses of Swinburne. By listening to their ebb and flow, the cadences that "seem to harmonize with the rhythm of the sea," Symons himself repeats the sublime fall into that sea. Transformed by Swinburne's rhythm, Symons thus presents himself as prototype for every reader, as if we too will read the poetry of Swinburne to discover "a rhythm inherent in nature."

To turn the cadence of Swinburne's poetry into a natural force, Symons draws on a nineteenth-century assumption that the word rhythm is connected to the regular movement of the waves of the sea. The etymology of rhythm, derived from the Greek noun rh-coveredos and the Greek verb rhouo, "to flow," would seem to confirm the idea that poets learn their rhythms from the sea. However, when submitted to closer linguistic analysis, as demonstrated by Emile Benveniste, the word rh-coveredos "in its most ancient uses never refers to flowing water, and it does not even mean rhythm" (1971: 282). Benveniste reconstructs another history for the word, as it moves from an early meaning of "form" (in ancient Ionian philosophy, it refers to the disposition and arrangement of parts in a whole, including the form of the letters of the alphabet: a spatial configuration) to a later, more specialized application to "form of movement" (in Plato, dance is a corporeal rh-coveredos determined by measure and numerically regulated: a temporal configuration). Benveniste therefore argues against a tendency to naturalize rhythm, especially with reference to its Greek origins.

We are far indeed from the simplistic picture that a superficial etymology used to suggest, and it was not in contemplating the play of waves on the shore that the primitive Hellene discovered rhythm; it is, on the contrary, we who are making metaphors today when we speak of the rhythm of the waves. It required a long consideration of the structure of things, then a theory of measure applied to the figures of dance and to the modulations of song, in order for the principle of cadenced movement to be recognized and given a name. Nothing is less "natural" than this slow working out. (287)

We may read Benveniste's essay not only as a critique of nineteenth-century philology—interrogating the assumptions shaping an etymology that "was taught more than a century ago, at the beginnings of comparative grammar, and . . . is still being repeated" (281)—but as an implicit response to a tradition of aesthetic idealism that would unify humans and nature under time, by projecting rhythm into nature.

This is the same aesthetic tradition that produces an idealist reading of Swinburne around the turn of the century, as exemplified in the rhapsodies of Symons. If the "principle of cadenced movement" is recognized and given a name in nineteenth-century theories of rhythm, Swinburne is read as the very embodiment of that principle, and perhaps even as the proper name for it. In Poets and Poetry of the Century (Miles 1898) Symons again rhapsodizes about the "mastery over poetical form" that enables Swinburne to sing "so naturally that he has sometimes given us only the notes of the music." His naturalized song becomes nature itself, as Symons concludes: "Nature . . . created him in a fit of extravagance" (1910: 284). Yet Swinburne's approach to rhythm is anything but natural, as we have seen: his imitations of Sappho self-consciously reflect on a Sapphic cadence, by turning it into a decadent form, a formal repetition that requires formalist reading. Swinburne is not the primitive Hellene who discovered "rhythm" in the sea (nor did the Hellene, if we follow Benveniste's argument). The revelation of rhythm in his Sapphic sublime returns us, rather, to the formalism of an earlier set of associations described by Benveniste: the rh-coveredos associated with metron, or meter, which mediates between the spatial and temporal configuration of forms that do not in themselves have organic consistency. By remembering Swinburne as a body dissolving into the sea, we make a metaphor of his Sapphic rhythm, not unlike the "metaphors of me" that Sappho projects into the future at the end of "Anactoria." Just as Benveniste concludes that "it is, on the contrary, we who are making metaphors today when we speak of the rhythm of the waves," it is we who are making metaphors of Swinburne, when we discover the rhythms of the sea in his poetry.

Nevertheless Swinburne's afterlife depends on a metaphorical reading of rhythm, as we see in Thomas Hardy's elegy written upon the death of Swinburne in 1909. In "A Singer Asleep," Swinburne seems to dissolve like Sappho into his own metaphor: his rhythms are repeated in the "unslumbering sea," where "from cove to promontory" he is "pillowed eternally"—a scenario immediately reminiscent of Swinburne's Sapphic sublime. Swinburne's corpse is hidden from view, like Sappho's corpus, but in the cadence of Hardy's poem his decomposing limbs are recomposed into the melody of Sapphic song, making him a member of "all the tribe that feel in melodies":

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

And one can hold in thought that nightly here 
His phantom may draw down to the water's brim, 
And hers come up to meet it, as a dim
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Lone shine upon the heaving hydrosphere,
And mariners wonder as they traverse near,
Unknowning of her and him.

One dreams him sighing to her spectral form:
"O teacher, where lies thy burning line;
Where are those songs, O poetess divine
Whose very orts are love incarnadine?"

And her smile back: "Disciple true and warm,
Sufficient now are thine."

(Stanzas VI–VIII)

These stanzas refigure familiar poems of Swinburne—most notably "Ave atque Vale" (the elegy for Baudelaire where the sea sobs around the Lesbian promontories, looking for the Leucadian grave of Sappho) and "Satia te Sanguine" (where the lost limbs of Lesbian Sappho swim loose for the streams to lift)—in order to imagine that Swinburne has finally found Sappho: his phantom... and hers meet where the waves heave on and on forever, in an eternal rhythm.

And yet, Hardy emphasizes that they meet only in, through, and as a metaphor. The sublime transport of Swinburne and Sappho contrasts with the more ordinary transportation of mariners, who traverse the same sea "unknowing of her and him," unable to feel the melodies of dissolving limbs, unable to hear the rhythm that Hardy projects into the movement of the waves. His vision of Swinburne is a speculation (something that "one can hold in thought"), and presented in the subjunctive ("his phantom may draw down... and hers come up") as a mere hypothesis ("One dreams him sighing to her spectral form."). Hardy also represents Swinburne's Sappho as a specular image, a reflection of a reflection, as her form comes up to meet his and his down to hers, each haunting the other like disembodied ghosts. "Where are those songs?" Swinburne sighs to Sappho—a rhetorical question, since her song is lost and cannot be answered except in the echo of her own words. "Sufficient now are thine..." is Sappho's response, but the ellipses after "thine" point to the disappearance of Swinburne's song along with hers. If Swinburne once was a "disciple true and warm," reincarnating Sappho, "whose very orts are love incarnadine," now he is also a disintegrating poetic corpus, a cold corpse.

The more we reread Hardy's elegy, the more it resists elegiac reconstitution. The final stanza, where "the waves peal their everlasting strains," echoes the declining cadence of a singer forever falling into silence. There is only a diminishing echo, in the rhyme of the last lines in the poem: "I leave him, while the daylight gleam declines / Upon the capes and chines." These lines do not re-integrate the body of Swinburne, but leave him scattered at sea, as Peter Sacks points out, "Capes sugestsa heads, and chines spinal ridges—prominences that are durable yet somehow severed" (1985: 234). While Sacks emphasizes the continuity of a Swinburnean legacy as a possible form of consolation, Hardy's elegy does not perform the usual work of mourning; what remains is "somehow severed," parts of Swinburne that are not quite recollected, scattered limbs, lost songs. The final stanza, in fact, serves to render dead the "I" who should be remembering Swinburne; rather than saying, "he has left me," Hardy says, "I leave him," as if he is the one who is dying. Hardy's elegy observes a logic of melancholia that structures all of his poetry, as Marjorie Levinson argues: a peculiar negativity that may be understood in psychoanalytic terms as the inability to mourn, the repetition of a loss without knowing what is lost, an emptying out of content in writing that claims only a posthumous existence.

The elegist in "A Singer Asleep" is indeed a melancholy figure, one who does not wish to remember Swinburne except by rote repetition of his metaphors and rhythms. The impulse to remember is thus displaced by a compulsion to repeat. Here, in addition to the Freudian conceptualization of melancholia as failed mourning, we can return to Freud's 1914 essay, "Recollection, Repetition and Working Through." To define repetition compulsion, Freud describes the patient who remembers nothing of what is forgotten: "He reproduces it not in his memory but in his behavior, he repeats it, without of course knowing that he is repeating it" (369). Furthermore, the greater the resistance to the memory, "the more extensively will expression in action (repetition) be substituted for recollecting" (370). Insofar as the analyst must learn to recognize the rhythms of this repetition, psychoanalysis would seem to be analogous to the metrical analysis of a poem: the measuring of intervals, the marking of a form. But while the purpose of psychoanalysis (terminable or interminable) would be to curb the compulsion to repeat and turn it into a motive for remembering, the purpose of our reading is not to reconstruct Hardy's memory of Swinburne, or indeed to reconstruct Hardy as a subject with a memory. Rather, by staying inside the repetition compulsion, by insisting on the rhythm without the recollection, we see how...

32 In "Object Bondage and Object Loss: Economies of Representation in Hardy's Poetry" (part of a forthcoming book on modernism), Marjorie Levinson connects the logic of melancholia to late-nineteenth-century commodity fetishism, in order to account for a poetry that is highly objectified yet emptied of content, resistant to reading.

33 For further reflections on the relationship between psychoanalysis and rhythmic reading, and the possibility of a "Freudian" theory of lyric, see Rawson 1994; through the poetry of Tennyson, he develops an account of formalist reading that is also relevant to later Victorian poets like Swinburne and Hardy, insofar as "the materiality of language—manifested most notably in its rhythmic articulations and in its iterability—haunts this poetry" (Ibid.: viii).
Hardy's elegy enacts another way to read Swinburne, by memorization.

Hardy presents a scene of reading in stanza 3 of his elegy, the poet's first encounter with the words of Swinburne: "I walked and read with a quick glad surprise / New words, in classic guise." Sacks calls this stanza an "elegiac fixing of a highly particularized and intense moment in the past," and finds a pun in "quick" to demonstrate how Hardy is enlivened by "absorption of the dead man's power...so crucial to the work of mourning and inheritance" (1985: 231). According to Sacks, Hardy identifies with Swinburne through the double reference of "new words, in classic guise," referring not only to Swinburne's poetry but also to the present poem. But this identification also works to consign Hardy's poem to the past, for by repeating "new words, in classic guise" Hardy's own words might turn out to be merely old words, in new disguise: the reiteration and evacuation of Swinburne's words, now a dead poetic corpus. From this perspective, the "elegiac fixing" that Sacks describes is more like a melancholy fixation on a moment in the past, without moving forward into mourning; the elegy is caught in a repetition, where an obsession with meter becomes a symptom of the inability to remember what those words might have meant.

The scene of reading is therefore inserted into Hardy's elegy as a memory of memorization, not unlike the moment in "On the Cliffs" where Swinburne describes his first encounter with Sappho, when "thy first Lesbian word / Flamed on me." The revelation of a Sapphic rhythm, as we saw in that poem, was mediated by a material inscription or "notation," the conversion of "tones" into "notes" that would allow for the performance of Sappho's song in written form. These are the "notes" that Hardy discovers in the pages of Swinburne's poetry, as well:

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

(Stanza 4)

The stanza emphasizes that Swinburne's "fresh-fluted notes" were not "naively" performed as melodies, but self-consciously mediated by writing, and stanza 2 likewise places its emphasis on the self-conscious artifice of Swinburne's poetry, as it dropped "In full of numbers freaked with musical closes, / Upon Victoria's formal middle time / His leaves of rhythm and rhyme." While Swinburne is identified as a "singer" in the title of Hardy's elegy, what he leaves behind circulates in written form, in "leaves" and "pages" (not unlike the rhythm and rhyme that are left on Hardy's page, when he ends the elegy with "I leave him"). The metaphor of a natural rhythm, projected onto the sea in the first and last stanzas of Hardy's elegy in an attempt to remember Swinburne, is therefore interrupted in the middle stanzas by the recounting of more mechanical, metrical effects that Hardy has memorized: if Swinburne's pages appear "passionate" and "fraught," the reason is their "numbers freaked with musical closes," a music measured in intervals according to the rules of prosody in mid-century England, "Victoria's formal middle time." This mechanical account of meter, as a written notation that achieves "musical closes" by the regulation of form, stands in contrast to an organic reading that would associate the poetry of Swinburne with the rhythms of nature and the natural embodiment of song.

Hardy's elegy refers us in particular to Swinburne's early metrical experiments, in the book that Hardy as a young man carried in his breast-pocket, according to Housman: "It was Moxon's first edition of Poems and Ballads, worn where it should be worn, just over the heart" (277). The book carried "just over the heart" is what Hardy learned by heart, memorizing the various meters of Swinburne and apparently incorporating them into his body as if they were second nature to him, much as Swinburne learns to incorporate the rhythms of Sappho in the Sapphic scene of instruction. As Dennis Taylor amply demonstrates in his book on Hardy's Metres and Victorian Prosody, "Hardy more or less began his poetic career by imitating classical verse," and these early imitations are mediated by Swinburne's classical verse, especially the Sapphic stanza; thus Wessex Poems begins with a poem in Sapphic meter ("The Temporary the All") and Hardy's experiments with the Sapphic stanza (both strict and loose) throughout his work can be traced back to the metrical marks in his personal copy of Swinburne's Poems and Ballads, where Hardy scanned two lines of Swinburne's "Sapphics" (Taylor 1988: 258). These marks demonstrate how meter must be recorded, in writing, before it can be memorized. Hardy "incorporates" this Sapphic rhythm into his own poetic corpus, not by internalizing what was dictated to him, but by repeating the process of its externalization. Meter proves to be a form of automatic writing, a mechanism for remembering something that was never forgotten because it was never "inside" Hardy to begin with, nor indeed in Swinburne either.

Hardy's elegy is a keen response to Swinburne's formalism, as its fixation on melancholy repetition defines lyric reading in terms of memorization rather than remembering. Swinburne is dead, and his corpus scattered; neither the poet nor his poetry is recollected in organic form; there is only the "phantom" of a "spectral form," the ghost of meter. Furthermore, the death of Swinburne allows Hardy to assume a posthumous relation to his own poetic corpus, as well. Even when Swinburne was still alive, he seemed to live as if already dead; in conversation apparently the
two poets "laughed and consoled with each other on having been the two most abused of living writers" (Murfin 1978: 82). Even in this personal "recollection," instead of remembering Swinburne, Hardy emphasizes the disfiguring of the lyric poet as a figure; the peculiar use of the past tense projects the fragmentary condition of Swinburne into the future as the necessary condition for his afterlife. It is as if both poets, "having been the most abused of living writers," are pronouncing themselves already dead. In this way they repeat the fate of Sappho, whose transmission in "mutated fragments" becomes the determining pattern for their own reception: Hardy, like Swinburne, like Sappho, will be remembered only by the compulsive repetition of that dismemberment. Hardy is not the only one to identify Swinburne's posthumous existence as the necessary condition for his lyricism. Housman begins an essay on Swinburne by describing the poet as if he had already been dead a long time: "When Mr. Swinburne died, April 1909, at the age of 72, he might as well have been dead for a quarter of a century" (277), and again, "Swinburne died last year, thirty years later than he would have died if the gods had loved him" (295). Despite his reputation as "our only great living poet," Swinburne's poetry appears to be a long-dead corpus on which Housman performs a relentless post mortem. The earlier poetry, he concedes, created new meters and recreated old; Swinburne successfully "resuscitated the heroic couplet" and "upon these dry bones Swinburne brought up new flesh and breathed into them a new spirit" (284-85). But to exhume and resuscitate the dead is not the same as giving them life; it makes them undead, and in this respect the early verse only serves to anticipate the later poetry which, according to Housman, is truly dead. Monotonous, mannered, perfunctory, repetitious, bookish, and stillborn, the late poems of Swinburne are "mechanically" assembled rather than organically unified. In fact," Housman concludes, "he came to write like an automaton, without so much as knowing the meaning of what he said" (293). But the automatism of Swinburne's writing can be understood as another version of rhythmic transport, the conversion of "natural" rhythms into a metrical sublime that was implicit, all along, in his Sapphic imitations.

Critics after Housman have often repeated his judgment of Swinburne, without realizing that the very terms of this assessment are embedded, still, in Swinburne's Sapphic sublime. While Swinburne was read at the turn of the century as the Victorian reincarnation of Sappho, Modernist readers several decades later were no longer interested in remembering Swinburne as a metrical body, be it living or dead. Their repudiation of Swinburne was also a rejection of Victorian prosody, because its regulation of rhythm felt like an unnatural and mechanical imposition of meter: increasingly difficult to read, and write, and memorize. Writing in 1987, Douglas Bush therefore finds Swinburne an altogether unmemorable poet: "Diffuse and undisciplined vagueness of emotion and expression make almost everything of Swinburne's pleasurable and forgettable; one remembers neither parts nor wholes" (355). More recently, over the past three decades, there has been renewed critical effort to reconstruct Swinburne's literary corpus and to reconstitute his reputation as lyric poet. In the collection of essays edited by Roosky entitled The Whole Music of Passion, for example, the emphasis is very much on making Swinburne's "whole" again, while Jerome McGann develops another approach to the reconstruction of Swinburne in Swinburne: An Experiment in Criticism: he impersonates different voices in dialogue to develop partial, self-interrupting interpretations of the poetry without integrating them into a unified portrait of the poet.

If Roosky's collection responds to Bush's complaint by remembering wholes, McGann's experiment therefore responds by recollecting Swinburne only in parts. For when we return to Swinburne, we should not forget how Hardy last left him: not a poet to be remembered, but one who is memorized. Swinburne's poetry is easy to memorize and many generations have done so, as McGann points out: "When Poems and Ballads was published the undergraduates at Oxford quickly memorized long passages from that truly memorable book. The accounts of Swinburne's contemporaries reinforce the evidence of dictionaries of quotations, that Swinburne is an exceedingly memorable poet" (286). Indeed, it is so easy to memorize Swinburne that "phrases and passages come randomly to mind" and McGann goes on to enumerate, at random, the passages and quotations that he himself has memorized. Reading Swinburne is, inevitably, a repetition compulsion: instead of recollecting the entire poetic corpus, McGann collects the parts of Swinburne that come to mind, in a rhythm; that is automatic, a self-starting mechanism beyond intention and conscious control. But in order to conclude his experiment in criticism, McGann finally moves from the parts to the whole, from passages that are "quickly memorized" to his admiration of "that truly memorable book" to the celebration of "an exceedingly memorable poet," as if Swinburne himself has been reclaimed by rote repetition of his words. "For this, if for nothing else, he too is unforgotten," McGann writes, in his very last sentence. But is Swinburne remembered by being "unforgotten"? What if Bush is right, not in his negative valuation of Swinburne's poetry, but in the recognition that "one remembers neither parts nor wholes'? If, as I have suggested, Swinburne disappears and reappears like Sappho in self-scattering rhythm, then we need not recollect the poet nor remember the poetic corpus in order to read Swinburne's poetry: his limbs can be loosened, again.