

ALGERNON CHARLES  
SWINBURNE

*POEMS AND BALLADS &  
ATALANTA IN CALYDON*

*Edited by* KENNETH HAYNES

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O swallow, sister, O rapid swallow,  
 50 I pray thee sing not a little space.  
 Are not the roofs and the lintels wet?  
 The woven web that was plain to follow,  
 The small slain body, the flowerlike face,  
 Can I remember if thou forget?

O sister, sister, thy first-begotten!  
 The hands that cling and the feet that follow,  
 The voice of the child's blood crying yet  
*Who hath remembered me? who hath forgotten?*  
 Thou hast forgotten, O summer swallow,  
 60 But the world shall end when I forget.

### *Anactoria*

τίνος αἶ τὸ πειθοῖ  
 μᾶψ σαγηνεύσας φιλότητα;  
 SAPPHO.

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  
 (Wilt thou fear that, and fear not my desire?)  
 Severed the bones that bleach, the flesh that cleaves,  
 10 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.  
 Let fruit be crushed on fruit, let flower on flower,  
 Breast kindle breast, and either burn one hour.  
 Why wilt thou follow lesser loves? are thine  
 Too weak to bear these hands and lips of mine?

I charge thee for my life's sake, O too sweet  
 To crush love with thy cruel faultless feet,  
 I charge thee keep thy lips from hers or his,  
 20 Sweetest, till theirs be sweeter than my kiss:  
 Lest I too lure, a swallow for a dove,  
 Erotion or Erinna to my love.  
 I would my love could kill thee; I am satiated  
 With seeing thee live, and fain would have thee dead.  
 I would earth had thy body as fruit to eat,  
 And no mouth but some serpent's found thee sweet.  
 I would find grievous ways to have thee slain,  
 Intense device, and superflux of pain;  
 Vex thee with amorous agonies, and shake  
 30 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 reluctance of the breath,  
 Dumb tunes and shuddering semitones of death.  
 I am weary of all thy words and soft strange ways,  
 Of all love's fiery nights and all his days,  
 And all the broken kisses salt as brine  
 That shuddering lips make moist with waterish wine,  
 And eyes the bluer for all those hidden hours  
 40 That pleasure fills with tears and feeds from flowers,  
 Fierce at the heart with fire that half comes through,  
 But all the flowerlike white stained round with blue;  
 The fervent underlid, and that above  
 Lifted with laughter or abashed with love;  
 Thine amorous girdle, full of thee and fair,  
 And leavings of the lilies in thine hair.  
 Yea, all sweet words of thine and all thy ways,  
 And all the fruit of nights and flower of days,  
 And stinging lips wherein the hot sweet brine  
 50 That Love was born of burns and foams like wine,  
 And eyes insatiable of amorous hours,  
 Fervent as fire and delicate as flowers,  
 Coloured like night at heart, but cloven through  
 Like night with flame, dyed round like night with blue,

Clothed with deep eyelids under and above –  
 Yea, all thy beauty sickens me with love;  
 Thy girdle empty of thee and now not fair,  
 And ruinous lilies in thy languid hair.  
 Ah, take no thought for Love's sake; shall this be,  
 60 And she who loves thy lover not love thee?  
 Sweet soul, sweet mouth of all that laughs and lives,  
 Mine is she, very mine; and she forgives.  
 For I beheld in sleep the light that is  
 In her high place in Paphos, heard the kiss  
 Of body and soul that mix with eager tears  
 And laughter stinging through the eyes and ears;  
 Saw Love, as burning flame from crown to feet,  
 Imperishable, upon her storied seat;  
 Clear eyelids lifted toward the north and south,  
 70 A mind of many colours, and a mouth  
 Of many tunes and kisses; and she bowed,  
 With all her subtle face laughing aloud,  
 Bowed down upon me, saying, 'Who doth thee wrong,  
 Sappho?' but thou – thy body is the song,  
 Thy mouth the music; thou art more than I,  
 Though my voice die not till the whole world die;  
 Though men that hear it madden; though love weep,  
 Though nature change, though shame be charmed to sleep.  
 Ah, wilt thou slay me lest I kiss thee dead?  
 80 Yet the queen laughed from her sweet heart and said:  
 'Even she that flies shall follow for thy sake,  
 And she shall give thee gifts that would not take,  
 Shall kiss that would not kiss thee' (yea, kiss me)  
 'When thou wouldst not' – when I would not kiss thee!  
 Ah, more to me than all men as thou art,  
 Shall not my songs assuage her at the heart?  
 Ah, sweet to me as life seems sweet to death,  
 Why should her wrath fill thee with fearful breath?  
 Nay, sweet, for is she God alone? hath she  
 90 Made earth and all the centuries of the sea,  
 Taught the sun ways to travel, woven most fine  
 The moonbeams, shed the starbeams forth as wine,

Bound with her myrtles, beaten with her rods,  
 The young men and the maidens and the gods?  
 Have we not lips to love with, eyes for tears,  
 And summer and flower of women and of years?  
 Stars for the foot of morning, and for noon  
 Sunlight, and exaltation of the moon;  
 Waters that answer waters, fields that wear  
 100 Lilies, and languor of the Lesbian air?  
 Beyond those flying feet of fluttered doves,  
 Are there not other gods for other loves?  
 Yea, though she scourge thee, sweetest, for my sake,  
 Blossom not thorns and flowers not blood should break.  
 Ah that my lips were tuneless lips, but pressed  
 To the bruised blossom of thy scourged white breast!  
 Ah that my mouth for Muses' milk were fed  
 On the sweet blood thy sweet small wounds had bled!  
 That with my tongue I felt them, and could taste  
 110 The faint flakes from thy bosom to the waist!  
 That I could drink thy veins as wine, and eat  
 Thy breasts like honey! that from face to feet  
 Thy body were abolished and consumed,  
 And in my flesh thy very flesh entombed!  
 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!  
 Ah sweeter than all sleep or summer air  
 120 The fallen fillets fragrant from thine hair!  
 Yea, though their alien kisses do me wrong,  
 Sweeter thy lips than mine with all their song;  
 Thy shoulders whiter than a fleece of white,  
 And flower-sweet fingers, good to bruise or bite  
 As honeycomb of the inmost honey-cells,  
 With almond-shaped and roseleaf-coloured shells  
 And blood like purple blossom at the tips  
 Quivering; and pain made perfect in thy lips  
 For my sake when I hurt thee; O that I  
 130 Durst crush thee out of life with love, and die,

Die of thy pain and my delight, and be  
 Mixed with thy blood and molten into thee!  
 Would I not plague thee dying overmuch?  
 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  
 140 A lyre of many faultless agonies?  
 Feed thee with fever and famine and fine drouth,  
 With perfect pangs convulse thy perfect mouth,  
 Make thy life shudder in thee and burn afresh,  
 And wring thy very spirit through the flesh?  
 Cruel? but love makes all that love him well  
 As wise as heaven and crueller than hell.  
 Me hath love made more bitter toward thee  
 Than death toward man; but were I made as he  
 Who hath made all things to break them one by one,  
 150 If my feet trod upon the stars and sun  
 And souls of men as his have alway trod,  
 God knows I might be crueller than God.  
 For who shall change with prayers or thanksgivings  
 The mystery of the cruelty of things?  
 Or say what God above all gods and years  
 With offering and blood-sacrifice of tears,  
 With lamentation from strange lands, from graves  
 Where the snake pastures, from scarred mouths of slaves,  
 From prison, and from plunging prows of ships  
 160 Through flamelike foam of the sea's closing lips –  
 With thwartings of strange signs, and wind-blown hair  
 Of comets, desolating the dim air,  
 When darkness is made fast with seals and bars,  
 And fierce reluctance of disastrous stars,  
 Eclipse, and sound of shaken hills, and wings  
 Darkening, and blind inexpiable things –  
 With sorrow of labouring moons, and altering light  
 And travail of the planets of the night,

And weeping of the weary Pleiads seven,  
 170 Feeds the mute melancholy lust of heaven?  
 Is not his incense bitterness, his meat  
 Murder? his hidden face and iron feet  
 Hath not man known, and felt them on their way  
 Threaten and trample all things and every day?  
 Hath he not sent us hunger? who hath cursed  
 Spirit and flesh with longing? filled with thirst  
 Their lips who cried unto him? who bade exceed  
 The fervid will, fall short the feeble deed,  
 Bade sink the spirit and the flesh aspire,  
 180 Pain animate the dust of dead desire,  
 And life yield up her flower to violent fate?  
 Him would I reach, him smite, him desecrate,  
 Pierce the cold lips of God with human breath,  
 And mix his immortality with death.  
 Why hath he made us? what had all we done  
 That we should live and loathe the sterile sun,  
 And with the moon wax paler as she wanes,  
 And pulse by pulse feel time grow through our veins?  
 Thee too the years shall cover; thou shalt be  
 190 As the rose born of one same blood with thee,  
 As a song sung, as a word said, and fall  
 Flower-wise, and be not any more at all,  
 Nor any memory of thee anywhere;  
 For never Muse has bound above thine hair  
 The high Pierian flower whose graft outgrows  
 All summer kinship of the mortal rose  
 And colour of deciduous days, nor shed  
 Reflex and flush of heaven about thine head,  
 Nor reddened brows made pale by floral grief  
 200 With splendid shadow from that lordlier leaf.  
 Yea, thou shalt be forgotten like spilt wine,  
 Except these kisses of my lips on thine  
 Brand them with immortality; 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 unfurrowed and unsown,  
 210 But in the light and laughter, in the moan  
 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.  
 Like me shall be the shuddering calm of night,  
 When all the winds of the world for pure delight  
 Close lips that quiver and fold up wings that ache;  
 When nightingales are louder for love's sake,  
 And leaves tremble like lute-strings or like fire;  
 220 Like me the one star swooning with desire  
 Even at the cold lips of the sleepless moon,  
 As I at thine; like me the waste white noon,  
 Burnt through with barren sunlight; and like me  
 The land-stream and the tide-stream in the sea.  
 I am sick with time as these with ebb and flow,  
 And by the yearning in my veins I know  
 The yearning sound of waters; and mine eyes  
 Burn as that beamless fire which fills the skies  
 With troubled stars and travailing things of flame;  
 230 And in my heart the grief consuming them  
 Labours, and in my veins the thirst of these,  
 And all the summer travail of the trees  
 And all the winter sickness; and the earth,  
 Filled full with deadly works of death and birth,  
 Sore spent with hungry lusts of birth and death,  
 Has pain like mine in her divided breath;  
 Her spring of leaves is barren, and her fruit  
 Ashes; her boughs are burdened, and her root  
 Fibrous and gnarled with poison; underneath  
 240 Serpents have gnawn it through with tortuous teeth  
 Made sharp upon the bones of all the dead,  
 And wild birds rend her branches overhead.  
 These, woven as raiment for his word and thought,  
 These hath God made, and me as these, and wrought

Song, and hath lit it at my lips; and me  
 Earth shall not gather though she feed on thee.  
 As a shed tear shalt thou be shed; but I –  
 Lo, earth may labour, men live long and die,  
 Years change and stars, and the high God devise  
 250 New things, and old things wane before his eyes  
 Who wields and wrecks them, being more strong than  
 they –  
 But, having made me, me he shall not slay.  
 Nor slay nor satiate, like those herds of his  
 Who laugh and live a little, and their kiss  
 Contents them, and their loves are swift and sweet,  
 And sure death grasps and gains them with slow feet,  
 Love they or hate they, strive or bow their knees –  
 And all these end; he hath his will of these.  
 Yea, but albeit he slay me, hating me –  
 260 Albeit he hide me in the deep dear sea  
 And cover me with cool wan foam, and ease  
 This soul of mine as any soul of these,  
 And give me water and great sweet waves, and make  
 The very sea's name lordlier for my sake,  
 The whole sea sweeter – albeit I die indeed  
 And hide myself and sleep and no man heed,  
 Of me the high God hath not all his will.  
 Blossom of branches, and on each high hill  
 Clean air and wind, and under in clamorous vales  
 270 Fierce noises of the fiery nightingales,  
 Buds burning in the sudden spring like fire,  
 The wan washed sand and the waves' vain desire,  
 Sails seen like blown white flowers at sea, and words  
 That bring tears swiftest, and long notes of birds  
 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, and waste the days thereof  
 280 With gladness and much sadness and long love.  
 Yea, they shall say, earth's womb has borne in vain  
 New things, and never this best thing again;

Borne days and men, borne fruits and wars and wine,  
 Seasons and songs, but no song more like mine.  
 And they shall know me as ye who have known me here,  
 Last year when I loved Atthis, and this year  
 When I love thee; and they shall praise me, and say  
 'She hath all time as all we have our day,  
 Shall she not live and have her will' – even I?  
 290 Yea, though thou diest, I say I shall not die.  
 For these shall give me of their souls, shall give  
 Life, and the days and loves wherewith I live,  
 Shall quicken me with loving, fill with breath,  
 Save me and serve me, strive for me with death.  
 Alas, that neither moon nor snow nor dew  
 Nor all cold things can purge me wholly through,  
 Assuage me nor allay me nor appease,  
 Till supreme sleep shall bring me bloodless ease;  
 Till time wax faint in all his periods;  
 300 Till fate undo the bondage of the gods,  
 And lay, to slake and satiate me all through,  
 Lotus and Lethe on my lips like dew,  
 And shed around and over and under me  
 Thick darkness and the insuperable sea.

*Hymn to Proserpine*

(AFTER THE PROCLAMATION IN ROME OF THE  
CHRISTIAN FAITH)

*Vicisti, Galilæe.*

I have lived long enough, having seen one thing, that love  
 hath an end;  
 Goddess and maiden and queen, be near me now and  
 befriend.  
 Thou art more than the day or the morrow, the seasons that  
 laugh or that weep;  
 For these give joy and sorrow; but thou, Proserpina, sleep.  
 Sweet is the treading of wine, and sweet the feet of the dove;

*Itylus*

The poem is a monologue by Philomela, the sister of Procne, who is the wife of Tereus, the king of Thrace (line 48). He lusts after Philomela, rapes her, and then cuts off her tongue and hides her. Philomela tells her story by weaving the events in the design of a tapestry (line 52), which she sends to Procne. The sisters revenge themselves by killing Itylus, the son of Tereus and Procne, and cooking him. Procne feeds him to Tereus and afterwards reveals what they have done; Tereus pursues them in a rage, but they are saved by the gods, who turn Philomela into a nightingale (line 19) and Procne into a swallow.

In Daulis (line 48), in central Greece, the women murdered Itylus, according to Thucydides (ii. 29). Swinburne appears to locate it on the Thracian coast, perhaps mistaking a detail from Matthew Arnold's 'Philomela' (1853). The wet roofs and lintels (line 51) may suggest the blood of Itylus; cf. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book 6, line 646 ('manant penetralia tabo', 'the room drips with gore'). 'Itylus' is the name in Homer; 'Itys' is more common. In Greek poetry, it is Procne who becomes the nightingale.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book 6, is the major source of the story. There are references to it in Homer (*Odyssey*, Book 19, lines 518-523), Aeschylus (*Agamemnon*, lines 1140-9 and *Suppliants*, lines 58-67), and Apollodorus. In addition to Matthew Arnold, Catulle Mendès was inspired by the legend; see 'Le Rossignol' in *Philoméla* (1863), which appeared shortly before Swinburne wrote his poem.

Swinburne combines iambs and anapests in stanzas of six tetrameters rhyming *abcabc*. 'Swallow' is a constant feminine rhyme in each stanza.

*Anactoria*

Swinburne's admiration for Sappho was unbounded. In a posthumously published appreciation ('Sappho', *The Saturday Review*, 21 February 1914, p. 228) he wrote:

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 thinking Sappho to be beyond all question and comparison the very greatest poet that ever lived. Æschylus is the greatest poet who ever was also a prophet; Shakespeare is the greatest dramatist who ever was also a poet; but Sappho is simply nothing less – as she is certainly nothing more – than the greatest poet who ever was at all. Such at least is the simple and sincere profession of my lifelong faith.

(See also Lang, 4, 124 and Swinburne's defence of the poem in 'Notes on Poems and Reviews', Appendix 1.)

Her ode beginning 'φαίνεται μοι', known to Swinburne as the 'Ode to Anactoria', provides the context of this poem: Sappho suffers intense erotic jealousy because of Anactoria's infidelity to her. In Swinburne's dramatic monologue, Sappho addresses Anactoria in an attempt to win her back. He works some of Sappho's own words into the address. (The standard text of Sappho at the time was Theodor Bergk's *Poetae Lyrici Graeci*, revised in 1853; citations to Bergk's edition are accompanied by those to the Loeb text, edited and translated by David A. Campbell, *Greek Lyric*, volume 1.)

line 63: 'For I beheld in sleep'; cf. 'In a dream I spoke with the Cyprus-born' (Bergk 86; Campbell 134).

line 70: 'a mind of many colours'; translates ποικίλοφρον, found in the first line of some texts of the Aphrodite ode.

lines 73-4: 'Who doth thee wrong, Sappho?' translates lines 19-20 of the Aphrodite ode.

lines 81-4 are a translation of the sixth stanza of the Aphrodite ode.

lines 189-200 are an expansion of Bergk 68, Campbell 55.

line 221: 'sleepless moon' conflates the moon and the sleepless speaker of one of the most famous fragments, though now denied by many to Sappho; Bergk 52, Campbell 168B.

In addition, Sappho's boasts that she will be remembered after death have been amplified in lines 203-14. The names Erinna (line 22) and Atthis (line 286) occur in some fragments. The name 'Erotion' (line 22) presumably refers to a male lover; see the note to Swinburne's poem 'Erotion'. Lines 260-5 allude to the legend of Sappho's suicide by drowning as the result of an unhappy love affair with Phaon.

The epigraph is an emendation, perhaps Swinburne's own, of a corrupt line in the Aphrodite ode; Swinburne's version means 'Whose love have you caught in vain by persuasion?' (Sappho calls Persuasion the daughter of Aphrodite; see Bergk 133, Campbell 200.)

'Reluctation' (line 33) means 'struggle, resistance, opposition' (*OED*: 'somewhat rare'; 'obsolete' with reference to bodily organs). Aphrodite's 'amorous girdle' (line 45) makes her irresistible; in lines 49-50, we are given the account of her birth from the ocean (Aphrodite Anadyomene); Paphos, line 64, is the site of her famous sanctuary on Cyprus. 'Storied' (line 68) means either 'ornamented with scenes from history or legend' or 'celebrated in history or story'. 'Flies' (line 81) means 'flees'. Swinburne activates the etymology of 'disastrous' in 'disastrous stars' (line 164); 'comet' and 'hair' (lines 161-2) are also connected etymologically. Pieria is a district in Thessaly associated with the Muses, and so the 'high Pierian flower' (line 195) is a poem as well as the garland for the victorious poet. 'Reflex'

(line 198) is a reflection of light. In line 302, the lotus produces dreamy forgetfulness, and Lethe is the river of oblivion.

Timothy A. J. Burnett, in 'Swinburne at Work: The First Page of "Anactoria"' (in *The Whole Music of Passion*, eds Rikky Rooksby and Nicholas Shrimpton, 1993), discusses and reproduces a draft of the first page of the poem. It is also reproduced in Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (1999), p. 118. Edmund Gosse discusses a first version of the poem in 'The First Draft of Swinburne's "Anactoria"' (*Modern Language Review*, 14, 1919, pp. 271–7).

The poem is in heroic couplets; all sentences come to a stop at the end of a line.

### *Hymn to Proserpine*

Constantine I, the first Christian Roman emperor, issued the Edict of Milan in 313 with the Eastern Roman emperor Licinius; it established religious toleration of Christians and protected their legal rights. Constantine's policy went further than official toleration, and he began to establish Rome as a Christian state. His nephew Julian (emperor from 361 to 363) announced his conversion to paganism in 361 and hence is known as Julian the Apostate (see L. M. Findlay, 'The Art of Apostasy', *Victorian Poetry* 28:1, Spring 1990, pp. 69–78, for the Victorian controversies over 'national apostasy' and the image of Julian). He became a fierce opponent of Christians, but his opposition had no lasting effect; his legendary dying words ('Vicisti, Galilae', 'Thou hast conquered, Galilean') were reported in Greek by Theodoret, the Bishop of Cyrrhus, in the fifth century.

Proserpine, or Persephone, is the wife of Hades and the queen (lines 2, 92) of the underworld; the river Lethe (line 36) and poppies (line 97) are associated with the oblivion of death. She is also Kore, a maiden (lines 2, 92) and the daughter of Demeter, the earth (line 93). She and Demeter are the subject of the mysteries at Eleusis. Swinburne contrasts the new queen of heaven (line 76), the Jewish (line 85, 'slave among slaves') virgin (lines 75, 81) mother of Christ, with Venus, the former queen. Venus is described as she rose from the sea (lines 78, 86–9); she is the 'mother of Rome' (line 80) both as Aeneas's mother and as Venus Genetrix; and she is called Cytherean (line 73) after her birthplace in Cythera.

'I have lived long enough' (line 1) quotes Macbeth's line from Act V, Scene 3, line 22. 'Galilean' (lines 23, 35, 74) is 'used by pagans as a contemptuous designation for Christ' (*OED*). In Greek 'unspeakable things' (line 52, ἀρρητὰ) can refer to the Eleusinian mysteries. L. M. Findlay (Swinburne, *Selected Poems*, 1982, pp. 257–8) suggests that the description of the wave of the world (line 54) is indebted to Turner's