

Swinburne: Criticism as Perversion

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The name of Algernon Charles Swinburne has long been coupled with the epithet “perverse”¹; Swinburne was accused of perversity early and often, and while the term irked him (and has continued to irk critics who defend him from it), the concept of perversion offers valuable purchase on some central features of his work. Scholarly assessments of this work are likely to begin by lamenting that critical acclaim has long eluded him, in spite of the wide readership and ardent admiration he enjoyed during his heyday; Jerome McGann and Charles Sligh’s 2004 observation that his “critical and speculative prose [is] still largely inviolate” (xv) is no longer entirely accurate, but it is still the rhetorical move that opens most recent considerations of Swinburne as a critic.²

One way to account for the relative neglect Swinburne’s work has suffered is its daunting scope: a poet who tried his hand at almost every form but the epic and whose technical skill was admired even by his detractors, he was also a prolific playwright, an innovative novelist, and an acute critic. In addition to presenting his own critics with an intimidating volume of work, Swinburne’s range makes his work resistant to classification. Part of the difficulty is his devoted attention to form, betokened by the production of a body of work that includes hexameters and Sapphics; the roundel form he created; odes; closet drama; epistolary fiction; and hoax reviews by imaginary critics of invented writers (to list only a handful). But this dedication to formal experimentation goes hand in hand with a marked penchant for dissolving or challenging boundaries. Though a commitment to formal structures may seem at odds with Swinburne’s characteristically transgressive approach to

borderlines, I argue that the two interests are closely related: to interfere with form is also to insist on form, because only when formal norms are established can they be perverted. And it is via a notion of perversion that I hope to elucidate a Swinburnean theory of form.

My working definition of this notion starts with Freud's concept of the perversions as "deviations in respect to the sexual aim" or what he figures as distracting way stations on "the road towards copulation." These "deviations" are aspects of ordinary sexuality that tip decisively toward perversion, in Freud's account, only when they effectively displace "the normal sexual aim [of ...] copulation" (*Three Essays* 15). Metaphorical rest stops along this figurative road thus include not merely the familiar divergences (sodomasochism, oral and anal sex, fetishism), but also kissing and "overvaluation of the sexual object" – that is, becoming "intellectually infatuated [...] by the mental achievements and perfections" of the beloved (16).

Perversion, then, as Freud describes it, might be seen as a refusal of single-mindedness, or – to put it the other way round – as a preference for multiplicity over singularity, for dispersed desires over those that are focused and linear. It is also clearly categorized as part of the bedrock of "normal" sexual development: "a disposition to perversions is an original and universal disposition of the human sexual instinct" (97). This disposition is evident, Freud argues, in children, whom he describes as "polymorphously perverse" – that is, finding gratification in a range of sensations that they experience in multiple physical sites; their pleasures, which are not localizable, are also neither hierarchical nor orderly.

This understanding of perversion is useful for reading Swinburne, first because it is structured around a notion of pleasure that is heterogeneous, dispersed, and non-(re)productive.³ The refusal to respect boundaries indicated by that quality of diffuseness with which he is regularly charged is also evident in his proclivity for blurring or mixing generic conventions; both tendencies can be read as characteristic features of his perverse style. But while the charge of diffuseness has long been a keynote of Swinburne criticism, beginning with his contemporaries and

continuing through the twentieth and into the present century, it has recently been read as symptomatic not of an inability to cohere, but of a refusal to do so – a reading that further paves the way for including it as part of a perverse aesthetics. Seen in this light, it comes into focus as one element in Swinburne's quest for what Alan Barr terms "a language that can be used to express disintegration" (1) – and the impulse toward such expression is evident both in Swinburne's recursive, dissolving formal structures and in his choice of stories that thematize dissolution and disintegration. The framework of these structures provides a counterpoint to the sense of dissolution – sounds sliding toward the non-referential, narratives that do not come together – that pervades his work.

The critical credo "art for art's sake," which Swinburne is credited with coining – or rather with borrowing and revising from French models⁴ in a characteristic act of ventriloquism we will examine later – provides another instance of his perverse ethos. This rallying cry has been read by Elizabeth Prettejohn as an insistence on "art's non-instrumentality, its refusal or incapacity to serve any end whatsoever, [which] becomes its defining quality, the factor that distinguishes it from all other areas of human endeavor" ("Algernon" 51). As her definition makes clear, the aesthetic claim that art refuses or is unable "to serve any end whatsoever" is strikingly similar to Freud's understanding of perversion, which is precisely non-instrumental in its refusal to be (re)productive, uncompromising in its rejection of the notion that literature should bear any moral or political fruit. In "William Blake: A Critical Essay," Swinburne insists, "the important thing [is] to have [...] work supremely well done, and to disregard all contingent consequences. You may extract out of Titian's work or Shakespeare's any moral or immoral inference you please; it is none of their business to see after that" (381). Note the distinction here: "art for art's sake" does not mean that art may not have moral (or political or social) effects on readers, but simply that it is not the artist's "business" to look for such consequences.

Certainly, Swinburne was interested in behaviors his peers labeled perverse, but where this leads Thaïs Morgan to speak of his "discourse

on perversity” (“Reimagining” 146, emphasis added), I understand the rationale he gives for insisting on “art for art’s sake” as being enacted in a perverse discourse – a language that is itself perverse. This reading offers a new purchase on the familiar claim that his language is self-referential, refusing or simply eschewing meaning; hence, T.S. Eliot’s gibe that “it is, in fact, the word that gives him the thrill, not the object. When you take to pieces any verse of Swinburne, you find always that the object was not there – only the word.”⁵ Here is language behaving like Freudian perversion, refusing to commit to a prescribed path with a fixed endpoint and instead taking endless detours on the road to meaning.

And this same pleasure in breaking bounds that marks Swinburne’s perverse critical ethos is exhibited in his formal choices. A frequent refrain in twenty-first-century criticism is how slippery the generic borders of his work are: as many critics note, Swinburne did not honor strict distinctions between literature and criticism. On the one hand, his literary works are now regularly read as a kind of criticism in their own right.⁶ On the other hand, recent assessments of his criticism have explored the ways it reads like experimental literature, rather than observing established critical conventions, and emphasized the features it shares with the literature it analyzes: narratives (of the reader’s experience) or impressionistic descriptions (of the works under analysis) that operate less by logic than by analogy or by seeking to recreate in the reader Swinburne’s reading experience with the work or writer under consideration.⁷ Thus, in the past ten years, the case has been persistently and persuasively made, both that Swinburne’s literature itself constitutes a serious body of criticism, and that his criticism rejects the generic conventions of the day and often opts to align itself instead with literature. As Jerome McGann has put it, for Swinburne, “the most perfect act of aesthetic criticism could only be another work of art” (*Swinburne* 23).

This importation of the conventions of literature itself into literary criticism has been described by Leo Bersani as operating on a kind of continuum:

The more seriously criticism takes its official function of remaining faithful to the text, the more it resembles art. [...] critical discourse begins to resemble the literature which is its object by drawing attention to itself [...] making a claim for the esthetic appeal of its own procedures [...] We have moved toward a community of writers, and away from hierarchical distinctions among poets, novelists, and critics. (312)

This "claim for the esthetic appeal of its own procedures" is precisely the quality that Andrew Kay locates in Swinburne's prose when he argues that Swinburne's critical "vision [...] entailed conveying one's own arbitrary impressions of poetry in lushly imaginative digressions that are themselves poetry, and are stylistically imitative of the verse they describe" (275). This mode of criticism abjured the critical conventions of the 1860s even as it paved the way for Pater and Wilde. Moreover, to write this way has the effect of disregarding generic boundaries, undermining what Bersani terms "hierarchical distinctions" not only between writers working in different genres (poets versus novelists), but also within a body of work like Swinburne's, which itself encompasses multiple genres.

For it is not only the generic boundaries demarcating literature and criticism that Swinburne confounds; Stefano Evangelista has recently shown how, "deconstructing his own authorial voice into a dialogic structure (critic and poet, English and French, anonymous and 'signed,' etc.), Swinburne explodes the integrity of authorship" (31). In other words, his writings effectively decompose the structures of the self, working to demonstrate its madeness and at the same time constantly foregrounding its instability, its own tendency toward dissolution. As a critic, novelist, playwright, and poet, Swinburne employs a voice that questions the integrity of the self and, at the same time, enacts its dispersal. This dynamic of an author or a self – an 'I' – who opts for multiplicity and diffusion over unity and cohesion is legible via theories of perversion that present alternatives to (and distaste for) linear, end-driven, reproductive desires.

In *A Future for Astyanax*, Bersani argues “that both an esthetic and an ethic of the fragmented self can be defended – even in a language which could never hope to perform that self” (310). Such fragmentation is not only manifestly apparent in, but also articulated and defended by Swinburne’s body of work – across genres – in a way that suggests a sustained commitment to the “ethic of the fragmented self” amounting to the defense for which Bersani implicitly calls. And the basis for such a defense is the commitment to an ethos of “art for art’s sake” rooted in the refusal of any product – even “a” self.

The interrelationship of the esthetic and the ethic of the fragmented self for the perverse artist/critic is evident in the repeated acts of ventriloquism Swinburne engages in when he blends his voice with those of other authors – living and dead, real and invented. He borrows authority and gains the ability to critique from a distance when he fabricates a French critic to skewer Matthew Arnold (“Matthew Arnold”). He seeks to disarm moralizing reviewers by anticipating their charges in an ironic rejection letter that prefaces the novel *A Year’s Letters* and constitutes a kind of counterattack on the critical establishment, mocking its limiting priorities.⁸ He pays subtle homage to Poe and Baudelaire, as Elizabeth Prettejohn has established, by paraphrasing them without overtly signaling his debt: “Not only the ideas of the Blake study, but also many of its actual words amount to a curious kind of translation of Baudelaire into English, one that, more strangely still, is also a retranslation of aspects of Poe’s text back into its original language” (“Algernon” 49). In each of these instances, his voice and his writing self are diffused and mingled with those of “others” even as he seems most sharply “himself,” most dogmatic in “his” opinions.

Both the ventriloquism outlined above and the staging of fragmented selves are very much on display in “Anactoria,” one of the most notorious poems in the scandalous *Poems and Ballads, first series* (1866), whose tumultuous reception eventually led Swinburne to publish the polemical self-defense, *Notes on Poems and Reviews*, later the same year. This dramatic monologue, uttered by Sappho, and his discussion of it in *Notes*,

offer fertile ground for exploring the perverse dynamics of Swinburne's work. The poem played a critical role in Swinburne's self-justification in the months after its publication had helped to win him scathing notoriety; and both poem and commentary offer extended considerations of Sappho, a central figure in Swinburne's formulation of a perverse aesthetic.

At the outset of *Notes*, Swinburne reluctantly assumes "the office of commentator on my own works" (17), and in this piece of self-criticism, he treats his own poetry directly, speaking as both author and critic as he explicates his writing and creative philosophy. The poem he addresses at the greatest length, offering the most exhaustive accounting of his own aims and procedures, is "Anactoria" – the work that earned the most critical ire upon its publication earlier that year.⁹ He launches his defense with the assertion that "the key-note which I have here touched was struck long since by Sappho. 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" (20), he continues, appealing at once to the elevated literary status of Sapphic verse and to its wide dissemination in schools to mitigate its shock value. Swinburne lauds Sappho for writing "verses [that] are the supreme success, the final achievement, of the poetic art" (21); and his preoccupation with her¹⁰ is closely linked to the formulation of his perverse aesthetics.

In "Anactoria," Sappho's desire for her faithless eponymous lover is initially figured as a longing for death and the dissolution it brings:

O that I

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!" (ll. 129-32)

This same-sex desire is not only non-reproductive, but actively non-productive, at first glance an iteration of that old story, sex = death. But instead of opting for the suicidal plunge for which Sappho, as unrequited lover, was perhaps best known in the Victorian imagination (Prettejohn, "Solomon"), this speaker ultimately consoles herself with the belief that

her words will render her immortal, even as her fickle beloved – and carnal love itself – fall prey to death. The pleasures of the flesh, Sappho assures herself, will not last, and so she need not mourn them. This self-generated immortality, proposed at the poem's end, works against the earlier wish for death, displacing it with the dream of a kind of life-in-death through art. Unlike corporeal love and life, Sappho's poetry will not end, and in this sense, too, Swinburne's representation of her subjectivity may be read as perverse: *not* moving toward a fixed and final endpoint, it is not subject to death, even metaphorically – instead, it offers the possibility of non-reproductive union.

Sappho imagines such a union in "Anactoria" as she envisions herself reanimated in the voices and bodies of those born after she is dead:

Yea, though thou [Anactoria] diest, I say I shall not die.
For these [future readers] shall give me of their souls, shall give
Life, [...]
Shall quicken me with loving, fill with breath,
Save me and serve me, strive for me with death." (ll. 290-94)

And the poet/speaker imagines living on not only in her words, chanted by others after her death, but by imbuing the natural world with her presence, forever mediating the perceptions of those who come after her via her song:

Men shall not see bright fire nor hear the sea,
Nor mix their hearts with music, nor behold
[...]
Lightning, with thunder for a hound behind
Hunting through fields unfurrowed and unsown,
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. (ll. 204-14)

So Sappho achieves renewed life in those who recite her words and see the world through the lens her poetry provides. She is thus doubly perverse,

flouting reproductive aims first with her same-sex passion for Anactoria and then by claiming the ability to reproduce herself by inducing later generations to reanimate her.

In the poem, the "men" in whose words, minds, and lives Sappho will live on are unspecified, but in *Notes* Swinburne explores what it means for him and others to take on the task of reviving her. How to negotiate this task presents a problem: even the best translation, he argues, can only faintly approximate the original: "I felt myself incompetent to give adequate expression in English to the literal and absolute words of Sappho." He cannot put Sappho's Greek words into English, he puns, without "traducing" her work. But such literalism, "it may be, is not the point." Instead, renouncing the ideal of fidelity to those "literal and absolute words," he seeks in "Anactoria" "to express and represent not the poem but the poet" (21).

On one level, then, Swinburne's poem grants Sappho the fate that Sappho, in the poem, prophesies for herself: it gives her renewed life by "quicken[ing her] with loving" – the loving words of a later reader/poet. "Anactoria" thus "represent[s] [...] the poet" Sappho by making her its speaker and portraying her thoughts, but also by seeding the poem with words and phrases from her verse. Though he eschews literal translation, Swinburne nevertheless depends on her voice, even as he quite consciously blends his own with it – relying with characteristic élitism on his readers to know when he does so: "I did not think it requisite to disfigure the page with a foot-note whenever I had fallen back upon the original text. Here and there, I need not say, I have rendered into English the very words of Sappho. I have tried also to work into words of my own some expression of their effect: to bear witness" (21). This approach dismantles distinctions between translation, literary creation, and criticism; it presents "Anactoria" as at once an original work and a commentary on Sappho, a reading of her poetry that simultaneously embodies the poet. At the same time, both the poem and Swinburne's commentary on it work to undo the boundaries between the nineteenth-century male poet and his ancient Greek female counterpart. In assuming

the persona – speaking with the voice – of Sappho, Swinburne suggests above, he is not so much suspending or setting to one side his “self” (as Robert Browning or Augusta Webster may be said to do when they take on the voices of a Renaissance Duke or a Victorian prostitute) as he is imaginatively conjoining himself with Sappho, expanding the boundaries of the self to merge their voices in “one body/ [of] song.”¹¹

Both the poem and Swinburne’s analysis of it are similarly marked by this breaking down of boundaries. The act of merging Swinburne describes in *Notes* as “cast[ing] my spirit into the mold of [Sappho’s]” (21) is recapitulated in the action of the poem itself, as its speaker anatomizes the dissolution of her singular identity, which blurs into both the body of her beloved and the natural world. Speaker and addressee become hard to distinguish, as the poem both presents and meditates on the linguistic and physical confusion of lover and beloved:

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. (ll. 11-14)

Although at first “I” and “thee” are distinct, by the middle of the second line, lips, veins, fruit, flower, and breasts intermingle and undo such distinctions (just as they undo the distinction between literal parts of the body – lips, veins, breasts – and figures for these parts – fruit, flower). It has become a critical commonplace to note that the poem’s language often refuses clearly to differentiate the two women, linguistically blurring the lovers’ bodies and sensations until it is unclear what belongs to whom.¹² And these fragmented and intermingled bodies are also perverse bodies; as Sappho imagines them dissolved by pain or racked by pleasure into their component parts – parts that no longer quite make up a whole – the effect is to replace linear narrative with the kind of oscillation characteristic of perversion: not a moving forward, but a moving around.

Of course, it is not only Sappho’s body, but also her body of work that is fragmented. And for Swinburne, Sappho is not just the “supreme poet,” but also the beginning of poetry; the genealogy he constructs for

poetry, starting with her, is – like the histories that unspool in so many of his works – a narrative of decadence and decay: “the descent is immeasurable from Sappho’s verse to mine, or to any man’s” (*Notes* 21). The supreme poet, whose work has been all but lost, exists now only in fragments (note the confusion here of body and *oeuvre*), leaving contemporary poets the task of seeking to approximate something that cannot be approximated. This narrative works against reproduction, in fact insisting upon its impossibility and lingering on the parts in typically perverse fashion, while delaying the recognition that reconstituting “a” whole is, precisely, impossible.

The significance of this fragmentation is taken up by Yopie Prins, who argues that Swinburne re-constitutes the dispersed body of the ancient poet as rhythm. Prins reads “Anactoria” as “the simultaneous composition and decomposition of the Sapphic body” and “On the Cliffs” as a different kind of re-membling of Sappho, where “the transmission or ‘memory’ of Sappho depends on this act of forgetting: no longer (if she ever was) a woman, poet, persona, or bird, but purely a recurring rhythm” (*Victorian* 140). Swinburne’s Sappho, Prins argues, exists only in the “fragments” that remain of her “body” of work – and even within these fragments, “Sappho” exists simply as rhythm, as the metrical trace that provides the only physical evidence of a doubly dissolved life – both body and body of work are gone.

But this metrical trace has a palpable presence. It helps “English boys [...] get by heart” her verses (*Notes* 20), and ensures that Sappho’s immortality has a physical component, as when Swinburne describes Sappho’s “lofty conscience of invincible immortality in the memories *and the mouths* of men” (*Notes* 22, emphasis added). Taken together, these images insist on the corporeality of recitation, the way it is experienced in and by the body – gotten by heart, filling men’s mouths. This emphasis on how the body feels metrical language links the physically sensuous experience of recitation with the affective response to that experience.

In this reading, meter itself becomes a form of criticism that blurs the boundary between poetry and commentary – a way of rewriting Sappho

that is also a reading of, and an homage to, her work. Whether we understand this reading as a celebration of fragmentation or simply as a recognition that the fragmentary condition of Sappho's work and afterlife in the world of letters figures the patchwork of pieces that constitute the self more generally, the dispersed self reconstituted as rhythm is an exemplary instance of Swinburne's perverse ethos. Rather than tending toward full meaning, both the song and the life are marked by a perverse refusal to cohere.

Moreover, to see Swinburne as re-collecting Sappho's *corps morcelé* in the form of rhythm is to see Freud's theory of polymorphous perversity at work. The self in fragments, discontinuous zones of pleasure that do not seek or wish to cohere, comes into focus as the willfully perverse self. These fragmented and intermingled bodies in "Anactoria," decomposed into discrete parts, are the body-in-pieces before it is understood as such by means of the alienation imposed by the mirror stage. What if, Swinburne as perverse theoretician seems to ask, the *corps morcelé* were not retrospectively constituted as moving toward unity?

Indeed, the perverse physical and emotional landscape the poem conjures up is defended in *Notes* on the grounds that it is eminently normal. Swinburne contends that the desires, moods, and behaviors deemed shocking by outraged critics are ordinary expressions of habitual states of feeling. "Anactoria," he argues, imagines the "outcome or outburst of foiled and fruitless passion recoiling on itself," going on to ask, "What is there now of horrible in this? the expressions of fierce fondness, the ardours of passionate despair? Are these so unnatural as to affright or disgust?" (22). The implication is that they are not horrible or unnatural, neither "obscene" nor out of the ordinary, but precisely familiar and natural – common feelings undergone by his readers in everyday life.

This understanding is central to Freud's theory, as well; the desires that he categorized as perversions are precisely normal. For Freud, perversion – or, more properly, what will *become* perversion if it is not abandoned – is the first efflorescence of desire, which in the chronological evolution he charts proceeds as a series of metonymic substitutions: the

breast replaces the milk that flows from it, which supplanted an earlier unity with the mother's body. If these universal desires of childhood attach themselves to objects or acts in adulthood that cannot lead to reproduction, only then is this dynamic considered perversion; the persistence, eruption, or reassertion of what were (as far as Freud was concerned) natural desires is now no longer seen as natural – or, perhaps, is still natural but now also perverse. And just as Freud insists that the developmental trajectory that ends in perversion is as common as that leading to "normal" reproductive sexuality, so Swinburne's criticism of his own poetry reads it as imagining and playing out emotional dramas that are not extraordinary, but unexceptional.

But while perversion is – for Freud and for Swinburne, in *Notes* – part of ordinary human experience, it also carries for both men a destabilizing power. In his rereading of Freud's theory of perversion, Jonathan Dollimore argues that for "Freud [...] there is something chaotic and subversive about perversion. The persistence and ever-threatened re-emergence of perversion means that civilization has failed to secure its own reproduction. [...] The perversions, therefore, become a paradigm of the (in)subordinate displacing the dominant (for that, read, heterosexual, reproductive, genital intercourse)" (21). Such a definition of perversion as a "paradigm of the insubordinate" describes Swinburne's work precisely: his poetry "displac[es] the dominant" with narratives of lesbian or hermaphroditic or necrophiliac desires, desires that more often than not end in death (when they don't begin there).

But as I hope I have shown, Swinburne's criticism, too, is imbued with a perverse aesthetic, one that we might describe in his own words as "Turning the fruitful feud of hers and his/ To the waste wedlock of a sterile kiss" ("Hermaphroditus" 18-19). This turning away from reproductive heterosexuality ("the fruitful feud of hers and his") is a perverse turn, but also one that may be said to bear fruit, in the form of the non-reproductive union ("waste wedlock"?) of writers like Sappho and Swinburne, whose voices blend to make new songs that are at the same time old. The non-instrumentality that undergirds "art for art's sake" also characterizes these

barren bonds, consummated only in song, but still rendered tangible in the metrical beat that disciplines poets' bodies and extends their lives "in the memories and the mouths of men" after death.

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Notes

¹ In 1864, George du Maurier denominated the poet a "little beast" with "an utterly perverted moral sense" (qtd in Morgan, "Perverse" 61), and many of Swinburne's earliest critics objected to his "perverse" subject matter. In the mid-1990s, critics such as Thaïs Morgan and Richard Dellamora drew on queer theory to argue, for instance, that the "perverse sexuality" in his works offers a way out of "the impasse of male gender norms" (Dellamora 71).

² See for instance Stefano Evangelista, Nick Freeman, Andrew Kay, and Catherine Maxwell.

³ Margot Louis describes Swinburne's representation in *Tristram of Lyonesse* of "a diffuse sexuality marked by multiple centers of pleasure. [...] In this context, Swinburne's famed diffuseness can be seen as an integral part of his profoundly original erotic vision" (647).

⁴ Both Evangelista and Elizabeth Prettejohn trace this link, while arguing that Swinburne's use of it is more than simply derivative.

⁵ For Eliot, this is a put down; for those rediscovering Swinburne in the latter half of the twentieth century, it becomes a new way to read his art; most recently, for Jerome McGann, it is a way to reimagine how language makes meaning: "'Hertha' is arguing that meaning can't be located at all [...] because the meaning it cares about is dynamic, not conceptual, and human, not abstract. The poem means through an unfolding textual play" ("Swinburne" 295).

⁶ Barr, Lyons, McGann, Morgan ("Swinburne's") and Prins have read his poems and Fluhr and Prins his novels as pointed forms of literary criticism; McGann and Prins have explored how his poetry analyzes the nature of language and subjectivity; and recent inquiries have focused on his literary works as trenchant interventions in debates of the day in fields

as varied as art criticism (Prettejohn), anthropology (McGann, "Swinburne"), and religion (O'Gorman).

⁷ See Evangelista, Kay, Maxwell.

⁸ Other more or less transparent hoaxes include his invention of other mouthpieces like the fictional "Cossu," whose hyperbolic criticism sends up the critical establishment; the mock-medieval introduction to "The Leper"; and his faux reviews (i.e., "The Monomaniac's Tragedy, and Other Poems, by Ernest Wheldrake," and "Les Abîmes. Par Ernest Clouët").

⁹ "This poem," writes Swinburne, "has excited [...] a more vehement reprobation [...] than any other of my writing" (*Notes* 19).

¹⁰ In addition to "Anactoria," "Sapphics" and "On The Cliffs" are centrally occupied with Sappho.

¹¹ Prettejohn observes that, while Swinburne may owe a debt to Baudelaire for helping to license his explorations of lesbian desire, the two poets' attitudes to it are quite different: "unlike Baudelaire [Swinburne] does not stand apart from it; he speaks as Sappho, rather than about her" ("Solomon" 112). This fusing of voices resembles the ventriloquism Prettejohn sees in "William Blake," where Swinburne adopts the voices of Baudelaire and Poe.

¹² The point has been made by McGann, Prettejohn, and Prins, among others.

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