

POSTHUMAN SAPPHO: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY VERSE

Dr Orla Polten

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[https://cambridge.academia.edu/
OrlaPolten](https://cambridge.academia.edu/OrlaPolten)

orlapolten@gmail.com

1. ‘Sappho [...] is the unique flame that rises from the dust of an epoch and remains after all else has crumbled. Her words possess a haunting immediacy, as though they were written yesterday, not millennia ago. She captures in her verses the sharpness of desire, the sting of love's longing, and the fleetingness of beauty, all with a precision that transcends time.’ Ezra Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (1910)

2. ‘The virtual is a memory-image, present but not yet actualised [...] The living being is above all a thoroughfare, and the essential thing is to know in what direction it is going: it endures in time, that is to say, it is subject to continuous change of form. The virtual is precisely that which could be, but is not yet.’ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (1907)

3. φάινεται μοι κῆνος ἴσος θεοῖσιν
ἔμμεν ὤνερ, ὅττις ἐναντίος τοι
ἰσδάνει καὶ πλάσιον ἄδῳ φωνεί-
σας ὑπακούει

He seems to me equal to gods that man
whoever he is who opposite you
sits and listens close
to your sweet speaking

(Sappho fr. 31 Campbell, trans. Anne
Carson)

4. -υ- x -υυ- υ--
-υ- x -υυ- υ--
-υ- x -υυ- υ--
-υυ--

(The sapphic strophe)

5. Golden rose the house, in the portal I saw
thee, a marvel, carven in subtle stuff, a
portent. Life died down in the lamp and flickered,
caught at the wonder.

Crimson, frosty with dew, the roses bend where
thou afar, moving in the glamorous sun,
drink'st in life of earth, of the air, the tissue
golden about thee.

Green the ways, the breath of the fields is thine there,
open lies the land, yet the steely going
darkly hast thou dared and the dreaded aether
parted before thee.

Swift at courage thou in the shell of gold, cast-
ing a-loose the cloak of the body, earnest
straight, then shone thine oriel and the stunned light
faded about thee.

Half the graven shoulder, the throat aflash with
strands of light inwoven about it, loveli-
est of all things, frail alabaster, ah me!
swift in departing.

Clothed in goldish weft, delicately perfect,
gone as wind! The cloth of the magical hands!
Thou a slight thing, thou in access of cunning
dar'dst to assume this?

Ezra Pound, ‘Apparuit’ (1912)

6. ‘Sappho is a beginning. Sappho is a primal
force. She is the very source and spring of
lyric poetry. In her work, we find the seeds
of what will grow into the great flowering of
the Greek lyric tradition. Her voice, though
fragmented, speaks to us with an immediacy
and power that is undiminished by time.’
H.D., ‘The Wise Sappho’ (c. 1916-1918)

7. *I know not what to do:
my mind is divided.*—Sappho.

I know not what to do,
my mind is reft:
is song's gift best?
is love's gift loveliest?

I know not what to do,
now sleep has pressed
weight on your eyelids.

H.D., ‘Fragment thirty-six’ from *Heliadora*
(1924)