"A MUSE IN TATTERS": HARDY'S *POEMS AND BALLADS*

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> *The character of a deceased friend or beloved kinsman is not seen, no – nor ought to be seen, otherwise than as a tree through a tender haze or a luminous mist, that spiritualises and beautifies it; that takes away, indeed, but only to the end that the parts which are not abstracted may appear more dignified and lovely; may impress and affect the more*.
>
> – Wordsworth, "Essays Upon Epitaphs" 58

Henry Thornton Wharton's *Sappho* collected and translated for the first time "all the one hundred and seventy fragments that [Sappho's] latest German editor thinks may be ascribed to her" (xiii-xiv). Beneath three translations of what Wharton listed as fragment 68, the poet Thomas Hardy pencilled his own version – which he would later publish as "Sapphic Fragment" in *Poems of the Past and the Present* – onto the foot of the page (fig. 1).[1] "That one day," Hardy went on to explain to Algernon Charles Swinburne in 1897, "when examining several English imitations of a well-known fragment of Sappho, I interested myself in trying to strike out a better equivalent for it than the commonplace 'Thou, too, shalt die' &c. which all the translators had used during the last hundred years." The letter continues: "I then stumbled upon your 'Thee, too, the years shall cover,' and all my spirit for poetic pains died out of me. Those few words present, I think, the finest *drama* of Death and Oblivion, so to speak, in our tongue" (*Letters* 158).

Hardy is referring to the following lines from "Anactoria" – the poem Swinburne described as his "especially horrible" reproduction of Sappho's ode (*Notes* 405-06) – which Wharton had excerpted (114):

> Thee too the years shall cover; thou shalt be
> 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