

# Two Poems

by [Jeffrey Burghauer](#) (December 2020)



*Sappho Embracing her Lyre*, Jules Elie Delaunay, 19th Century

## Plectrum

*[Sappho] wrote nine books of lyric poetry and invented the plectrum for playing the lyre. –The Suda Lexicon*

The spring lamb's ring

Of viscera was meant

Receptive, soft.

But razor-rent,

Bleached, plaited, prim,

Hard, surfeit-free,

Becomes a sym-

Bol of Intent.

And now, the string

Will happily discard

The music trough'd

And reservoir'd

(For it dislikes

This custody)

When Sappho strikes

Hard against hard.

Prepared to sing,

She, mastering the grand

Precision heft

Of hatred and

Of medicine,

Insults the three

Tons hidden in

A tightened strand.

The offering

She'll have is not the bed,

Nor the croft

Alive with bread.

"Some paid me love

By giving me

The secrets of

Their works," she said.

These secrets wing,

And sigh, and glow, and strut.  
Maintained aloft,  
They're sickly, but  
They're better than  
The poetry  
Since secrets can  
Be tough as gut.

from *Kindertotenlieder*<sup>[\*1]</sup>

Just before the child died,  
He, without a fuss,  
Bent to the receding tide  
Like Aurelius.—

*Just before the child died.*

Just before the child died,  
Father studied son  
With tenacious, frantic-eyed  
Stupefaction.—

*Just before the child died.*

Just before the child died,  
God, however (clad  
Firewise, bent, Time-astride)  
Went completely mad.—  
*Just before the child died.*

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[\[\\*\]](#) “Songs on the Death of Children”

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