11. George Eliot, *Romola*, ed. Andrew Sanders (London: Penguin, 1980), 433.
12. Eliot, *Mill*, 363–64.
13. Arnold, *Culture*, 33.

Rhyme

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ONE enigmatic statement about rhyme appears all the time in Victorian poetry criticism. It's this: "Rhyme has been said to contain in itself a constant appeal to Memory and Hope."[1] The statement is attributed to Arthur Hallam, the critic whose early death is the subject of Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850). Hallam's idea of rhyme has long been used to explain the form of the *In Memoriam* stanza; in the forward and backward movement of the *abba* rhymes, readers keep hearing the melancholy play of memory and hope that Hallam described.[2]

Hallam's statement has become an axiom of Victorianist close reading, but in its original context it described a set of *historical* phenomena: the migration of rhyme from Arabic to Provençal poetry and the cultivation of rhyme's expressive properties by the troubadours. Hallam, I argue, borrowed his idea from Romantic literary historiography, most directly from J. C. L. Simonde de Sismondi's *De la littérature du midi de l'Europe* (1813; trans. 1823). This intellectual background matters, both for our understanding of Victorian poetics and for our own ways of approaching questions of form. It tells us, surprisingly, that in the nineteenth-century imagination rhyme's effects were tied to its origins: no form without history. It also tells us that there was no such thing as Victorian rhyme if "Victorian" means England and the nineteenth century. Victorian rhyme was a medievalist and orientalist idea about the origin of European poetry, and it arose from Continental aesthetics and literary history writing.

Few people read Sismondi's comparative literary scholarship today. It is exactly the kind of large-scale historiography that twentieth-century formalism reacted against—but it was widely read in its time. The book, written in a period of conversation with Germaine

de Staël and August Schlegel, traces the development of Romance-language literatures from their medieval beginnings. Sismondi's claim is that European rhyme derived from Arabic love lyrics; when Provençal troubadours began to rhyme, they were learning from the poetry of Arabia via Al-Andalus. From the love poems of Provence, rhyme entered the rest of Europe. This view is known as the Arabist (or Hispano-Arabic) theory of rhyme, and Sismondi helped popularize it in the nineteenth century.[3]

I focus here on a moment in Sismondi's history that dramatizes the Arabist theory and exemplifies the entanglement of formal and historical approaches to poetry at this time. It's an anecdote that tantalized the poets: Robert Browning, Algernon Swinburne, and Ezra Pound all wrote verses about it. A lovelorn twelfth-century troubadour, Geoffrey (Jaufré) Rudel, hears of a beautiful and virtuous Countess of Tripoli. He falls in love with her sight unseen, sets out on a boat to find her, and gets sick on the journey. She learns that a poet is dying of love for her, and she meets him aboard the ship. They have a touching encounter before he is "silenced by the convulsions of death."[4] In Sismondi's faintly rhyming formulation, "he was buried at Tripoli, beneath a tomb of porphyry, which the countess raised to his memory, with an Arabic inscription."[5] Other accounts elaborate on the countess's grief: she becomes a nun and spends the rest of her life devoted to Rudel's memory.

This story is about love in solitude and over long distance. For Rudel the love is prospective and for the countess it is retrospective, but in both cases the moment of their meeting is just a blip in a longer story of longing. The story had been told before, but in Sismondi's historiography it takes on special narrative significance. Rudel is not just one of the first troubadours, and he's not just the personification of *amour de loin*—"distant love"—a prototype and extreme variant of courtly love. He is also a crucial figure in the transnational history of rhyme, a poet who turns Arabic verse forms into Provençal lyric.

Sismondi introduces Rudel as his narrative pivots from Arabic to Provençal prosody. He writes, "In Arabic poetry . . . the second verse of each couplet frequently terminates with the same word, and this repetition has been, likewise, adopted by the Provençals. A remarkable example of it may be found in some verses of Geoffrey de Rudel,"[6] and then he tells Rudel's story and presents a poem that resembles the Arabic couplet form (the ghazal) he has just described. Here is Thomas Roscoe's translation of Sismondi's Rudel poem, which appeared alongside versions in Provençal and French. Note the play of monorhyme

against repetition, with every other line landing insistently on the word "afar" [*luench/ loin*].

> Angry and sad shall be my way,
> If I behold not her afar,
> And yet I know not when that day
> Shall rise, for still she dwells afar.
> God! Who hast formed this fair array
> Of worlds, and placed my love afar,
> Strengthen my heart with hope, I pray,
> Of seeing her I love afar [etc.][7]

On the page, the repeating word "afar" seems to denote the spatial and temporal distance that the other rhymes reach across. The poem doesn't just describe *amour de loin*: it convinces us that rhyme intrinsically is *amour de loin*—a kind of long-distance longing.

The poem appears to corroborate Sismondi's historical argument about the transmission of rhyme through the Mediterranean, and it helps make his case for the elegiac and erotic properties of rhyme. It demonstrates, through the poem's material verse structure, both the genealogy and the poetics he is promoting.[8] When Sismondi comes to some general observations about rhyme, he makes its formalization of troubadour love explicit. The troubadours, adapting the rhymes of Arabic poetry into a variety of stanzaic forms, found "the secret and mysterious associations" between modern prosody and the emotions. When the troubadour "uttered his bold, nervous, and resounding rhymes; or in tender and voluptuous strains, expressed the vehemence of his love," he was discovering that "[r]hyme is an appeal to our memory and to our expectations" ("*La rime est un appel au souvenir et à l'espérance*").[9]

Which brings us back to the aphoristic sentence of Arthur Hallam's that took on the status of a theory in the nineteenth century: "Rhyme has been said to contain in itself a constant appeal to Memory and Hope." On the face of it, Hallam's statement addresses rhyme's formal and affective qualities only. It tells us that the distance between two rhyme words is a space of desire: the first word bends toward the second—longs for it, even—and the second word when we reach it remembers the first (and its longing), maybe with a retrospective longing of its own. As readers we participate in this desire, so that when we read rhymes the hoping and remembering and longing are also ours. Hallam's is an account of rhyme on the page and in the body and mind; it seems resolutely ahistorical. But of course, it isn't. What Victorian rhyme *contains in itself* is stories

about the history of rhyme: Rudel's hope and the Countess of Tripoli's memory; Provence's worship of Arabic poetry; the way the troubadours tuned Arabic rhyme to their loving and longing feelings. Hallam's English theory of rhyme, borrowed from Sismondi, is actually a dream of rhyme's many translations—the route by which Victorian rhyme arrived.

Notes

1. Arthur Hallam, "The Influence of Italian Upon English Literature," in *The Writings of Arthur Hallam*, ed. T. Vail Motter (New York: Oxford University Press, 1943), 222, n. 10.
2. Coventry Patmore, review of *In Memoriam* by Alfred Tennyson, in *North British Review* 13, no. 26 (1850): 545–46. See also, for example, Christopher Ricks, *Tennyson* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 296; and Seamus Perry, *Alfred Tennyson* (Horndon: Northcote House, 2005), 136.
3. See Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977); María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987); and Roberto M. Dainotto, *Europe (In Theory)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
4. J. C. L. Simonde de Sismondi, *Historical View of the Literature of the South of Europe*, Vol. 1, trans. Thomas Roscoe (London: Henry Colburn, 1823), 105.
5. Sismondi, *Historical View*, 105. Thanks to Stefanie Markovits and Ben Glaser for hearing this rhyme.
6. Sismondi, *Historical View*, 104.
7. Sismondi, *Historical View*, 106.
8. Sismondi's version is no longer considered part of Rudel's corpus; see the variants in Rupert T. Pickens, ed., *The Songs of Jaufré Rudel* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), 150ff., which follow a different rhyme scheme. On the unreliability of Rudel's sixteenth-century editor, see Boase, *The Origin*, 11–12.
9. Sismondi, *Historical View*, 116–17; Sismondi, *De la littérature du midi de l'Europe*, vol. 1 (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1813), 115. See also Germaine de Staël's observation that rhyme "is the image of hope and of memory" in *Germany*, Vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1813), 289.