

INTERPRETING ANCIENT HISTORY

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Figure 2 *Sappho and Alcaeus*. Detail. Attic red figure kalathos, attributed to the Brygos Painter, c.470 BCE. Staatliches Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, Munich, 2416. Sappho stands next to her contemporary, the lyric poet Alcaeus, also from the island of Lesbos.

2 DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS IN SAPPHO'S LYRICS

J. J. Winkler

Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig in their *Lesbian Peoples: Material for a Dictionary*¹ devote a full page to Sappho. The page is blank. Their silence is one quite appropriate response to Sappho's lyrics, particularly refreshing in comparison to the relentless trivialization, the homophobic anxieties and the sheer misogyny that have infected so many ancient and modern responses to her work.² As Mary Barnard (34) puts it:

I wanted to hear
Sappho's laughter
and the speech of
her stringed shell.

What I heard was
whiskered mumble-
ment of grammarians:

Greek pterodactyls
and Victorian dodos.

The very eminent classical scholars from F. G. Welcker to Denys Page who have assembled and sifted through so much of what can or might be known of Sappho, and whose work is indispensable to us, had their own matrices of understanding, their own concerns and commitments, which were, I should think, no more and no less time-bound and culture-specific than are ours.³ But I doubt that those scholars would have understood our matrices (feminist, anthropological, pro-lesbian), given

that their expertise was in such things as ancient metrics (“pterodactyls”) rather than in ancient mores, whereas we are able in some good measure to understand theirs. This is an example of what I will refer to below as double consciousness, a kind of cultural bilingualism on our part, for we must be aware of and fluent in using two systems of understanding. Because Lobel and Page assumed the validity of Victorian no-no’s, they were (it now seems to us) deaf to much of what Sappho was saying, tone-deaf to her deeper melodies. The forms of both worship and anxiety that have surrounded Sappho in the ancient and modern records require some analysis.⁴ Part of the explanation is the fact that her poetry is continuously focused on women and sexuality, subjects which provoke many readers to excess.⁵

But the centering on women and sexuality is not quite enough to explain the mutilated and violent discourse which keeps cropping up around her. After all Anacreon speaks of the same subjects. A deeper explanation refers to the *subject* more than the object of her lyrics – the fact that it is a *woman* speaking about women and sexuality. To some audiences this would have been a double violation of the ancient rules which dictated that a proper woman was to be silent in the public world (defined as men’s sphere) and that a proper woman accepted the administration and definition of her sexuality by her father and her husband.

I will set aside for the present the question of how women at various times and places actually conducted their lives in terms of private and public activity, appearance, and authority. If we were in a position to know more of the actual texture of ancient women’s lives and not merely the maxims and rules uttered by men, we could fairly expect to find that many women abided by these social rules or were forced to, and that they sometimes enforced obedience on other women; but, since all social codes can be manipulated and subverted as well as obeyed, we would also expect to find that many women had effective strategies of resistance and false compliance by which they attained a working degree of freedom for their lives.⁶ Leaving aside all these questions, however, I simply begin my analysis with the fact that there was available a common understanding that proper women ought to be publicly submissive to male definitions, and that a very great pressure of propriety could at any time be invoked to shame a woman who acted on her own sexuality.

This is at least the public ethic and the male norm. It cannot have been entirely absent from the society of Lesbos in Sappho’s time. Unfortunately, our knowledge of that period and place is limited to a few general facts and rumors – a culture of some luxury, at least for the wealthy; aristocratic families fighting each other for power; the typical sixth-century

emergence of tyrannies (Myrsilos) and mediating law-givers (Pittakos). Sappho’s kin were clearly active in this elite feuding since she was banished with them from Lesbos to Sicily around the turn of the century. Lacking a reasonably dense texture of social information, . . . and given the fragmentary state of her literary remains (in contrast to *Daphnis and Chloe* and the *Odyssey*), [other] kinds of anthropological investigation . . . become much more difficult.

What I want to recover in this chapter are the traces of Sappho’s consciousness in the face of these masculine norms of behavior, her attitude to the public ethic and her allusions to private reality. This is becoming a familiar topic and problem in feminist anthropology: Do women see things in the same way as men? How can gender-specific differences of cultural attitude be discerned when one group is muted? Does their silence give consent? Or have we merely not found the right questions to ask and ways of asking them? My way of “reading what is there”⁷ focuses on the politics of space – the role of women as excluded from public male domains and enclosed in private female areas – and on Sappho’s consciousness⁸ of this ideology. My analysis avowedly begins with an interest in sexual politics – the relations of power between women and men as two groups in the same society. In some sense the choice of a method will predetermine the kind and range of results which may emerge: a photo-camera will not record sounds, a non-political observer will not notice facts of political significance. Thus my readings of Sappho are in principle not meant to displace other readings but to add to the store of perceptions of “what is there.”

There are various “publics and privates” which might be contrasted. What I have in mind here by “public” is quite specifically the recitation of Homer at civic festivals considered as an expression of common cultural traditions. Samuel Butler notwithstanding, Homer and the singers of his tradition were certainly men and the homeric epics as we have them cannot readily be conceived as women’s songs. Women are integral to the social and poetic structure of both *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and the *notion* of a woman’s consciousness is particularly vital to the *Odyssey*. . . But Nausikaa and Penelope live in a male-prominent world, coping with problems of honor and enclosure which were differentially assigned to women, and their “subjectivity” in the epic must ultimately be analyzed as an expression of a male consciousness. Insofar as Homer presents a set of conventional social and literary formulas, he inescapably embodies and represents the definition of public culture as male territory.⁹

Archaic lyric, such as that composed by Sappho, was also not composed for private reading but for performance to an audience (Merkelbach

1957; Russo 1973–4). Sappho often seems to be searching her soul in a very intimate way but this intimacy is in some measure formulaic (Lanata) and is certainly shared with some group of listeners. And yet, maintaining this thesis of the public character of lyric, we can still propose three senses in which such song may be “private”: first, composed in the person of a woman (whose consciousness was socially defined as outside the public world of men); second, shared only with women (that is, other “private” persons: “and now I shall sing this beautiful song to delight the women who are my companions,” frag. 160 L-P,¹⁰); and third, sung on informal occasions, what we would simply call poetry readings, rather than on specific ceremonial occasions such as sacrifice, festival, leave-taking, or initiation.¹¹ The lyric tradition, as Nagy argues, may be older than the epic, and if older perhaps equally honored as an achievement of beauty in its own right.

The view of lyric as a subordinate element in celebrations and formal occasions is no more compelling than the view, which I prefer, of song as honored and celebrated at least sometimes in itself. Therefore I doubt that Sappho always needed a sacrifice or dance or wedding *for which* to compose a song; the institution of lyric composition was strong enough to occasion her songs *as songs*. Certainly Sappho speaks of goddesses and religious festivities, but it is by no means certain that her own poems are either for a cult-performance or that her circle of women friends (*hetairai*) is identical in extension with the celebrants in a festival she mentions.¹² It is possible that neither of these latter two senses of “private” were historically valid for Sappho’s performances. Yet her lyrics, as compositions which had some publicity, bear some quality of being in principle from another world than Homer’s, not just from a different tradition, and they embody a consciousness both of her “private,” woman-centered world and the other, “public” world. This chapter is an experiment in using these categories to unfold some aspects of Sappho’s many-sided meaning.

Poem 1: Many-mindedness and Magic

One of the passages in Sappho which has been best illuminated in recent criticism is her first (and now only) complete poem, *poikilophron athanat’ Aphrodita*. The reason for thinking that it stood first in a collection of her works is that Hephaestion, writing a treatise on meters in the second century C. E., took it as his paradigm of what was by then called the Sapphic stanza. The very notion, however, of a first poem in a first book hardly makes sense in Sappho’s world, where the text seems to have circulated at

first as a script and score for professional and amateur performers. Then we have to allow for some three to four hundred years in which single songs, groups of songs, various collections which interested performers made for their own use were in circulation before the scholar-librarians at Alexandria assembled, sorted, and compared the many variant versions to produce a canonical corpus of Sappho’s lyrics in eight or nine books.

There were in fact at least two editions produced at the Alexandrian library, one by Aristophanes (who seems to have invented the convention that there were exactly nine great lyric poets of early Greece; Pfeiffer 205) and one by his pupil and successor Aristarchos.¹³ Two of her fragments survive in written copies which may actually pre-date those standard editions: one scrawled on a shard and one on papyrus, both of the third century B. C. E. (fragments 2 and 98). The survival of poem 1 is due to the fact that Dionysios of Halikarnassos, writing a treatise on style, chose it for quotation as an example of perfect smoothness. This is sheer good luck for us; he might have quoted Simonides.

In the handing on of the text from one scribe or performer to another until it reaches our modern editors, who fiddle with it some more before handing it over to us, further uncertainties are introduced. The works of Dionysios and Hephaestion were themselves copied many times over before they reached us. The sort of problem which infects even canonical book texts is illustrated by the first word in Sappho’s poem 1. Some manuscripts of Dionysios and some of Hephaestion write *poikilothron*, which all modern editors prefer, and other manuscripts have *poikilophron* (Neuberger-Donath), for which a strong and interesting argument may be made. *Poikilophron* means “having a mind (*-phron*) which is *poikilos*,” a notion usually translated by words like “dappled,” “variegated,” “changeful,” “complex.” It designates the quality of having many internal contrasts, whether perceived by the eye or by the mind. An embroidered robe is *poikilos*, Odysseus’ crafty mind is *poikilos*.

I call attention to this not only as a lesson in the almost immeasurable distance, with all its stages of loss and distortion, which separates Sappho and her whole world from us but also because poem 1 is an astonishing example of *many-mindedness* (for want of a more elegant term). Other Greek lyric poets sing marvelous poems of hate and sorrow and personal ecstasy which is somehow never very far from regret and chagrin, but they do so from a single perspective, elaborating the mind and feelings of a single persona in a fixed situation. Sappho’s poem 1, however, contains several personal perspectives, whose multiple relations to each other set up a field of voices and evaluations. This field-effect makes the rest of Greek lyric appear, by contrast, relatively single-minded, or as we can now

say, not-*poikilos*. The field in poem 1 includes at least three Sapphos, two Aphrodites, an unnamed girlfriend (representative of many), and (in virtue of echoing and parody effects) several homeric characters as well.

Let us consider the last first. Several analyses have developed the idea that Sappho is speaking in an imagined scene which represents that of Diomedes on the battlefield in *Iliad* 5 (Cameron 1949; Page 1955: 7; Svenbro; Stanley; Rissman). Sappho uses a traditional prayer formula, of which Diomedes' appeal to Athena at *Iliad* 5. 115-7 is an example ("Hear me, Atrytone, child of aegis-bearing Zeus; if ever you stood beside my father supporting his cause in bitter battle, now again support me, Athena"), and she models Aphrodite's descent to earth in a chariot on the descent of Athena and Hera (5. 719-72), who are coming to help the wounded Diomedes (5.781). Sappho asks Aphrodite to be her ally, literally her companion in battle, *summachos*.

Intricate, undying Aphrodite, snare-weaver, child of Zeus, I pray thee,
do not tame my spirit, great lady, with pain and sorrow. But come to me
now if ever before you heard my voice from afar and leaving your father's
house, yoked golden chariot and came. Beautiful sparrows swiftly
brought you

to the murky ground with a quick flutter of wings from the sky's height
through clean air. They were quick in coming. You, blessed goddess,
a smile on your divine face, asked what did I suffer, this time again,
and why did I call, this time again, and what did I in my frenzied heart
most want to happen. Whom am I to persuade, this time again . . .
to lead to your affection? Who, O Sappho, does you wrong? For one who
flees will

soon pursue, one who rejects gifts will soon be making offers, and one
who

does not love will soon be loving, even against her will. Come to me
even now

release me from these mean anxieties, and do what my heart wants done,
you yourself be my ally.¹⁴

About the Greek text we should first note that even this one integral poem has a nick on its surface. At the beginning of its fifteenth line (line 19 in the quatrain arrangement adopted in many editions), the manuscripts of Dionysios give a garbled reading and the papyrus copy (P. Oxy. 2288), which is from the second century C.E., although it gives a slightly more intelligible run of letters is still not entirely clear. Second, about pronunciation we have, I think, to confess that the music of a pitch-accent language is not easily appreciated by speakers of a stress-accent

language, and further that there are deep uncertainties not only about the placement of the pitch in Aeolic Greek but about fundamental principles concerning their vowels and consonants. The ancient Greek grammarians tell us that Aeolic Greek was psilotic (that is, it did not use initial h), that its accent was everywhere recessive (did not fall on the final syllable of a word), that it used -sd-for-ds- and br-for initial -r-. But as Hooker has emphasized, this information is very dubious, in some cases being contradicted by inscriptions found on Lesbos, in others applying at most to orthography rather than to actual pronunciation, and in any case of questionable relevance to the state of verbal performance and the art of singing many centuries before the grammarians.

Just as we can demonstrate that virtually all biographical information recorded by the Peripatetic and Alexandrian scholars is based on inferences from the poems themselves, and are frequently mistaken inferences, because they had nothing but the texts themselves to work with, so the grammarians' dogmas are not based on any privileged access to the seventh century B.C.E. and in certain respects we actually know more than they did.

But with that very skeptical prelude, I invite you now to read aloud what was one of the most beautiful compositions in all of archaic Greek verse:

poikilophron âthanat' Aphroditâ
pai Dios doloploke, lissomai se,
mê m' asaisi mêd' oniaisî damna, potnia, thûmon.

alla tuid' elth', ai pota kâterôta
tâs emâs audâs aïoisa pêloi
eklues, patros de domon lipoisa chrûsion êlthes,
arm' upasdeuxaisa; kaloi de s' âgon
ôkees strouthoi peri gâs melainâs
pukna dinnentes pter' ap' ôranôitheros dia messô,

aipsa d' exîkonto; su d', ô makaira,
meidiaisais' âthanatôi prosôpoi
êre' otti dêute pepontha kôtti dêute kalêmmi

kôtti moi malista thelô genesthai
mâinolai thûmôi. "Tina dêute peithô
aps s'agên es san philotâta? Tis s', ô Psapph', adikêi?
kai gar ai pheugei, tacheôs diôxei;

ai de dôra mê deket', alla dôsei;
ai de mê philei, tacheôs philêsei kouk etheloisa.

elthe moi kai nûn, chalepân de lûson
 ek merimnân, ossa de moi telessai
 thûmos îmerrei, teleson; su d' autâ summachos esso.

One way of interpreting the correspondences which have been noticed is to say that Sappho presents herself as a kind of Diomedes on the field of love, that she is articulating her own experience in traditional (male) terms and showing that women too have manly excellence (*aretê*; Bolling 1958, Marry). But this view that the poem is mainly about *erôs* and *aretê* and uses Diomedes merely as a background model, falls short.¹⁵ Sappho's use of homeric passages is a way of allowing us, even encouraging us, to approach her consciousness as a woman and poet reading Homer. The homeric hero is not just a starting point for Sappho's discourse about her own love, rather Diomedes as he exists in the *Iliad* is central to what Sappho is saying about the *distance* between Homer's world and her own. A woman listening to the *Iliad* must cross over a gap which separates her experience from the subject of the poem, a gap which does not exist in quite the same way for male listeners. How can Sappho murmur along with the rhapsode the speeches of Diomedes, uttering and impersonating his appeal for help? Sappho's answer to this aesthetic problem is that she can only do so by substituting her concerns for those of the hero while maintaining the same structure of plight / prayer / intervention. Poem 1 says, among other things, "This is how I, a woman and poet, become able to appreciate a typical scene from the *Iliad*."

Though the Diomedea is a typical passage, Sappho's choice of it is not random, for it is a kind of test case for the issue of women's consciousness of themselves as participants without a poetic voice of their own at the public recitations of traditional Greek heroism. In *Iliad* 5, between Diomedes' appeal to the goddess and the descent of Athena and Hera, Aphrodite herself is driven from the battlefield after Diomedes stabs her in the hand. Homer identifies Aphrodite as a "feminine" goddess, weak, *analkis*, unsuited to take part in male warfare (331, 428). Her appropriate sphere, says Diomedes exulting in his victory over her, is to seduce weak women (*analkides*, 348–9). By implication, if "feminine" women (and all mortal women are "feminine" by definition and prescription) try to participate in men's affairs – warfare or war poetry – they will, like Aphrodite, be driven out at spear point.

Poem 1 employs not only a metaphorical use of the *Iliad* (transferring the language for the experience of soldiers to the experience of women in love) and a familiarization of the alien poem (so that it now makes better sense to women readers), but a *multiple identification* with its characters.

Sappho is acting out the parts both of Diomedes and of Aphrodite as they are characterized in *Iliad* 5. Aphrodite, like Sappho, suffers pain (*odunêisi*, 354), and is consoled by a powerful goddess who asks "Who has done this to you?" (373). Aphrodite borrows Ares' chariot to escape from the battle and ride to heaven (358–67), the reverse of her action in Sappho's poem (Benedetto, who refers to the poem as "Aphrodite's revenge"). Sappho therefore is in a sense presenting herself both as a desperate Diomedes needing the help of a goddess (Athena/Aphrodite) and as a wounded and expelled female (Aphrodite/Sappho) seeking a goddess' consolation (Dione/Aphrodite).

This multiple identification with several actors in an Iliadic scene represents on another level an admired feature of Sappho's poetics – her adoption of multiple points of view in a single poem. This is especially noteworthy in poem 1 where she sketches a scene of encounter between a victim and a controlling deity. The intensification of both pathos and mastery in the encounter is due largely to the ironic *double consciousness* of the poet-Sappho speaking in turn the parts of suffering "Sappho" and impassive goddess. Consider the cast of characters in poem 1, each different and each regarding the others with a look of mingled admiration and distrust. There is first the speaker in need, whose name we learn in line 15 is Psappo.¹⁶ She is praying for help to Aphrodite, who is therefore the implied fictional audience of the entire poem and is to be imagined listening to all its words. Part of what Aphrodite hears is a narrative account of how she herself on a previous occasion mounted her sparrow-drawn chariot and drove down the sky and answered Sappho's prayers with a series of questions. This past-Aphrodite is not at all the same as the present-Aphrodite: the past-Aphrodite is an active character in the praying-Sappho's narrative, while the present-Aphrodite says nothing, does nothing, only listens – and presumably smiles.

One might wonder at the lengthy elaboration of the chariot-narrative, full of circumstantial detail, but I think the point is to create a slow build-up from distance to nearness, the goddess coming gradually closer to the speaker, taking her time (poetically, in the movement of the verse, even though she twice says it was a quick journey). As Aphrodite comes physically closer, she also becomes more vivid. First, her words are reported in indirect speech, and then she breaks into direct speech, so that Sappho the singer, impersonating Sappho in needful prayer, now suddenly is speaking in the voice of Aphrodite herself, so that the word "you," which from the beginning has been directed to Aphrodite, in line 15 now refers to Sappho. Fictional speaker and fictional audience change places, or rather the present-Aphrodite now hears from the mouth of

praying Sappho the words which the past-Aphrodite spoke to the past-Sappho. The slow approach to this direct speech, starting far away (*péloi*) in heaven, makes Aphrodite's words a kind of epiphany, a reported epiphany in a prayer asking for a repetition of the same.

For Sappho is once again tied up in a state of anxious desire. The three times repeated word for this is *déute*, which is a contraction of *aute*, "again," and *dé*, an intensifying particle, something like "indeed," which gives a flavor to "again" which we might read as quizzical or ironic or pretended disappointment. Since the past-Aphrodite says "once again" to the past-Sappho, we are led to think of yet another Sappho, the one who got into the same fix before. The doubling of Aphrodite (present and past) and the tripling of Sappho (present, past, and . . . pluperfect) leads like the mirrors in a fun house to receding vistas of endlessly repeated intercessions, promises, and love affairs.

The appearance of an infinite regress, however, is framed and bounded by another Sappho. The person who we must think of as designing the whole is functionally and indeed practically quite different from any of the Sapphos in the poem. The author-performer who impersonates a character-in-need is not at the moment, at least *qua* performer, in need. In fact my primary impression of poem 1 is one of exquisite control, which puts Sappho-the-poet in a role analogous to Aphrodite's as the smiling, tolerant, ever helpful ally of her own *thumos*, "spirit." The guileful weaver, the many-minded one who performs intricate shifts of perspective, is fictionally Aphrodite but poetically Sappho herself.

The sounds of the first line are worth a close inspection, for they contain a meaning which is quite untranslatable. With the reading *poikilophron*, "many-minded," aided by the compound *áthana²*, "not-mortal," it might be possible to hear in the very name of Aphrodite a playful etymology: the negative prefix *a-* plus the root *phro-* would yield "no-minded." Certainly the verbal field of the poem, with all its references to guile and to Sappho going out of her mind, encourages the possibility. Note too how the sounds of *poikilophron* and *doloploke* are recycled: *poikilo-* and *-ploke* have just the same consonants.

Such attention to micro-accuracies is typical of much Greek verse, and for Sappho we have at least one other case of etymologizing a divine name in a novel way. Fragment 104a reads "Hesperos, bringing together everything which shining Dawn scattered, you bring the sheep, you bring the goat, you bring the child to its mother" (or possibly, "you bring the child away from its mother"). The two syllables of the Greek root meaning Evening Star, (*H*)*es-per*, are echoed in the word "you bring," *pher-eis*, three times repeated. J. S. Clay, who pointed this

out (a scholiast on Euripides' *Orestes* had noticed it too), takes it as a reevaluation of Hesiod's characterization of Dawn as the one who scatters the family and sends people to work.¹⁷ This is a good example of how closely textured and in-wrought Sappho's verse can be, and what a high standard of complexity and intention we are justified in applying.

But if such weaving and complexity give *poikilophron* a good claim to being the first word of Sappho's poem 1, there are also attractive reasons on the side of *poikilothron*, which is most often taken to mean "sitting on an elaborately wrought throne." Although there certainly were, as Page (1955: 5) catalogues, elaborately wrought thrones, the interesting side of this compound word is not *thronos* meaning "throne" but a much rarer root, *throna*, found once in Homer, once in Theokritos, and several times in the Alexandrian poets Nikandros and Lykophron (Lawler; Bolling 1958; Putnam; see also Bonner). In the later poets it refers to some kind of magic drugs. Theokritos' young woman in Idyll 2 is trying to perform a ceremony which will enchant her lover and bring him back to her. She tells her servant to smear the drugs, *throna*, on the threshold of Delphis' house and say "I am sprinkling the bones of Delphis." "Sprinkle" is the standard translation of the verb *passó*, but homeric physicians also "sprinkle" drugs (*pharmaka*) onto wounds, so possibly the verb can include the more general action of applying or putting on.¹⁸

The homeric occurrence of the word is highly suggestive. Andromache is sitting at her loom, soon to hear the news of her husband Hektor's death. "She was weaving loom-cloth in a corner of the high house, a red double cloak, and she was sprinkling variegated *throna* on it" (*Iliad* 22.440-1): *en de throna poikil' epasse*. The conjunction of *throna* and *poikila* here might well tempt us to wonder whether Sappho actually did sing *poikilothron*, and if so what would it mean. The usual interpretation of *throna* in *Iliad* 22 is "embroidered flowers." "Embroidered flowers" is surely too diminished a translation of the *throna* which Andromache is "sprinkling" onto her cloth. Instead I would sketch the semantic field of *throna* as somehow including both drugs and weaving.

I have already noted that "sprinkle" (*passó*) is what one does with *throna*, whether they are put on wounds or on loom-cloth. For further connections between drugs and weaving, I would cite the figure of Helen the weaver, who not only weaves (literally, "sprinkles") the story of the *Iliad* into her loom-cloth (3.125-8) but when she is home with Menelaos sits near him with a basket of wool and a spindle and when the war-tales they tell make everyone melancholy she puts drugs (*pharmaka*) into the wine-bowl and has it served around (*Odyssey* 4.120-35, 219-33).

Another locus for the conjunction of weaving and drugs is the *kestos*, the girdle, of Aphrodite, which too is described as *poikilos* and contains worked into it the powers to charm and enchant (*Iliad* 14.214–21). Helen's drugs and Aphrodite's charmed girdle are powerful magic, using the world loosely to designate many forms of alternate, unofficial therapy. Since women did sing while spending long hours at the loom (so Kirke at *Odyssey* 10.221–2), I can readily imagine that some of those chants would wish good things onto the cloth and even that filaments of lucky plants and patterns of luck-bringing design would be woven into the best fabric.

In 1979 a new papyrus fragment of a Greek magical handbook was published which is very important for the fragmentary and suppressed history of that subject (Brashear; Maltomini; Obbink; Janko). Since most of the surviving collections of spells exist in copies made in the second to fourth centuries C.E., it is easy enough for traditional historians to dismiss all that as a late and alien intrusion into the sanctuary of rational Greek culture. But the new papyrus belongs to the late first century B.C.E. and confirms what is likely enough on other grounds – that the writing down of magic has a history comparable to other kinds of writing. Magical spells to produce love or cure a headache (both contained in the new papyrus) are like collections of natural marvels and folktales, the sort of cultural product which has a long and detailed oral history but which no one thought to write down until the changed social conditions of the Alexandrian and Roman empires. Certainly in the one area of magic which does have a continuous textual history from the sixth century B.C.E. to the sixth century C.E. – viz., curses written on lead and buried, sometimes with tortured dolls, in graves of the untimely dead – we can assert with confidence that the practice itself is ancient and uninterrupted.

For students of Sappho the fascinating feature of the new magical papyrus is that its language has some resemblance to that of poem 1. It involves an enchanted apple which is to be thrown in the direction of the intended love-object. The throwing of apples as a token of erotic interest is a quite widespread custom in Greek communities.¹⁹ The incantation is a hexameter prayer to Aphrodite, asking her to “perfect this perfect song,” or “fulfill a song of fulfillment,” using the same word which Sappho repeats in her last stanza, “accomplish what my heart desires to accomplish.” This is fairly standard in the language of prayer and request (*Iliad* 14.195–6). Standard too is the address to a great goddess as *potnia thea*, “lady goddess,” found both in poem 1 and in the magical papyrus, but in the fragmentary magical text it is found next to the word *apothanô*, “I may die,” which is found several times in Sappho (fragment 94: “I

wish without guile to die;” fragment 31: “I seem to be little short of dying”). Closer still are the words *katarrechô, autos de me pheugei*, “I am running after, but he is fleeing from me” (column 2, line 12). Other magical papyri contain calls for assistance in terms as immediate and direct as Sappho's to Aphrodite to come and stand beside her in battle as a fellow-fighter: e.g., “Come and stand beside me for this project and work with me” (PGM XII.95). All of this may mean no more than that the magical papyrus shows the influence of Sappho, but the magical associations of *throna* (if that is the right reading) might explain why the later enchanter would naturally be drawn to echoing Sappho poem 1.

Poised between two possibilities – the many-mindedness of *poikilothron*, the magic of *poikilothron* – I can see no way to decide that one must be right and the other wrong. Better to allow both to be heard and to appreciate how Sappho in poem 1 may be alluding to a goddess' magic and certainly is demonstrating her many-mindedness. Such multiple self-mirroring in the face of another, along with the alternation of viewpoints so that we in turn sympathize with and stand apart from each of the poem's five characters, is an achievement which reaches out into a different dimension, compared with the other Greek poets of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E. This complexity of understanding, which generates a field of personal perspectives, each regarding the other as alike but different, shows how comparable lyrics by poets of her time are quite truly and profoundly solo performances.

Such many-mindedness is intrinsic to the situation of Greek women understanding men's culture, as it is to any silenced group within a culture which acknowledges its presence but not its authentic voice. This leads to an interesting reversal of the standard (and oppressive) stricture on women's literature that it represents only a small and limited area of the larger world.²⁰ Such a view portrays women's consciousness according to the *social* contrast of public/private, as if women's literature occupied but a small circle somewhere inside the larger circle of men's literature, just as women are restricted to a domestic enclosure. But insofar as men's public culture is truly public, displayed as the governing norm of social interaction “in the streets,” it is accessible to women as well as to men. Because men define and exhibit their language and manners as *the* culture and segregate women's language and manners as a subculture, inaccessible to and protected from extra-familial men, women are in the position of knowing two cultures where men know only one.

From the point of view of *consciousness* (rather than physical space) we must diagram the circle of women's literature as a larger one which includes men's literature as one phase or compartment of women's

cultural knowledge. Women in a male-prominent society are thus like a linguistic minority in a culture whose public actions are all conducted in the majority language. To participate even passively in the public arena the minority must be bilingual; the majority feels no such need to learn the minority's language. Sappho's consciousness therefore is necessarily a double consciousness, her participation in the public literary tradition always contains an inevitable alienation.

Poem 1 contains a statement of how important it is to have a double consciousness. Aphrodite reminds "Sappho" of the ebb and flow of conflicting emotions, of sorrow succeeded by joy, of apprehensiveness followed by relief, of loss turning into victory. The goddess' reminder not to be singlemindedly absorbed in one moment of experience can be related to the pattern of the *Iliad* in general, where the tides of battle flow back and forth, flight alternating with pursuit. This is well illustrated in *Iliad* 5, which is also the homeric locus for the specific form of alternation in fortunes which consists of wounding and miraculous healing. Two gods (Aphrodite and Ares) and one hero (Aineias) are injured and saved.

Recuperative alternation is the theme of poem 1, as it is of *Iliad* 5. But because of Sappho's "private" point of view and double consciousness it becomes not only the theme but the *process* of the poem, in the following sense: Sappho appropriates an alien text, the very one which states the exclusion of "weak" women from men's territory; she implicitly reveals the inadequacy of that denigration; and she restores the fullness of Homer's text by isolating and alienating its deliberate exclusion of the feminine and the erotic.

For when we have absorbed Sappho's complex re-impersonation of the homeric roles (male and female) and learned to see what was marginal as encompassing, we notice that there is a strain of anxious self-alienation in Diomedes' expulsion of Aphrodite. The overriding need of a battling warrior is to be strong and unyielding; hence the ever-present temptation (which is also a desire) is to be weak. This is most fully expressed at *Iliad* 22.111–30, where Hektor views laying down his weapons to parley with Achilles as effeminate and erotic. Diomedes' hostility to Aphrodite (= the effeminate and erotic) is a kind of scapegoating, his affirmation of an ideal of masculine strength against his *own* possible "weakness." For, in other contexts outside the press of battle, the homeric heroes have intense emotional lives and their vulnerability there is much like Sappho's: they are as deeply committed to friendship networks as Sappho ("He gave the horses to Deipylos, his dear comrade, whom he valued more than all his other age-mates," 325–6); they give and receive gifts as Sappho does; they

wrong each other and re-establish friendships with as much feeling as Sappho and her beloved. In a "Sapphic" reading, the emotional isolation of the Iliadic heroes from their domestic happiness stands out more strongly ("no longer will his children run up to his lap and say 'Papa,'" 408). We can reverse the thesis that Sappho uses Homer to heroize her world and say that insofar as her poems are a reading of Homer (and so lead us back to read Homer again) they set up a feminine perspective on male activity which shows more clearly the inner structure and motivation of the exclusion of the feminine from male arenas.

I return to the image of the double circle – Sappho's consciousness is a larger circle enclosing the smaller one of Homer. Reading the *Iliad* is for her an experience of double consciousness. The movement thus created is threefold: by temporarily restricting herself to that smaller circle she can understand full well what Homer is saying; when she brings *her* total experience to bear she sees the limitation of his world; by offering her version of this experience in a poem she shows the strengths of her world, the apparent incompleteness of Homer's, and casts new illumination on some of the marginal and easily overlooked aspects of Homer. This threefold movement of appropriation from the "enemy," exposure of his weakness and recognition of his worth is like the actions of homeric heroes who vanquish, despoil and sometimes forgive. Underlying the relations of Sappho's persona to the characters of Diomedes and Aphrodite are the relations of Sappho the author to Homer, a struggle of reader and text (audience and tradition), of woman listening and man reciting.

Poem 16: What Men Desire

A sense of what we now call the sexual politics of literature seems nearly explicit in poem 16:

Some assert that a troupe of horsemen, some of foot-soldiers, some that a fleet of ships is the most beautiful thing on the dark earth; but I assert that it is whatever anyone desires. It is quite simple to make this intelligible to all, for she who was far and away preeminent in beauty of all humanity – Helen – abandoning her husband, the . . . , went sailing to Troy and took no thought for child or dear parents, but beguiled . . . herself . . . , for . . . lightly . . . reminds me now of

Anaktoria

absent: whose lovely step and shining glance of face I would prefer to see than Lydians' chariots and fighting men in arms . . . cannot be . . . human . . . to wish to share . . . unexpectedly.

[This is a poem of eight stanzas, of which the first, second, third and fifth are almost intact, the rest lost or very fragmentary.]

It is easy to read this as a comment on the system of values in heroic poetry. Against the panoply of men's opinions on beauty (all of which focus on military organizations, regimented masses of anonymous fighters), Sappho sets herself – “but I” – and a very abstract proposition about desire. The stanza first opposes one woman to a mass of men and then transcends that opposition when Sappho announces that “the most beautiful” is “whatever you or I or anyone may long for.” This amounts to a reinterpretation of the kind of meaning the previous claims had, rather than a mere contest of claimants for supremacy in a category whose meaning is agreed upon (Wills, duBois 1978). According to Sappho, what men mean when they claim that a troupe of cavalymen is very beautiful is that they intensely desire such a troupe. Sappho speaks as a woman opponent entering the lists with men, but her proposition is not that men value military forces whereas she values desire, but rather that all valuation is an act of desire. Men are perhaps unwilling to see their values as erotic in nature, their ambitions for victory and strength as a kind of choice. But it is clear enough to Sappho that men are in love with masculinity and that epic poets are in love with military prowess.

Continuing the experiment of reading this poem as about poetry, we might next try to identify Helen as the Iliadic character. But Homer's Helen cursed herself for abandoning her husband and coming to Troy; Sappho's Helen, on the contrary, is held up as proof that it is right to desire one thing above all others, and to follow the beauty perceived no matter where it leads. There is a charming parody of logical argumentation in these stanzas; the underlying, real argument I would reconstruct as follows, speaking for the moment in Sappho's voice. “Male poets have talked of military beauty in positive terms, but of women's beauty (especially Helen's) as baneful and destructive. They will probably never see the lineaments of their own desires as I do, but let me try to use some of their testimony against them, at least to expose the paradoxes of their own system. I shall select the woman whom men both desire and despise in the highest degree. What they have damned her for was, in one light, an act of the highest courage and commitment, and *their own poetry* at one point makes grudging admission that she surpasses all the moral censures leveled against her – the Teichoskopia [Survey from the Wall, *Iliad* 3.121–244]. Helen's abandonment of her husband and child and parents is mentioned there (139, 174), and by a divine manipulation she feels a

change of heart, now desiring her former husband and city and parents (139) and calling herself a bitch (180). But these are the poet's sentiments, not hers; he makes her a puppet of his feeling, not a woman with a mind of her own. The real Helen was powerful enough to leave a husband, parents and child whom she valued less than the one she fell in love with. (I needn't and won't mention her lover's name: the person – male or female – is not relevant to my argument.) Indeed she was so powerful that she *beguiled Troy itself* at that moment when, in the midst of its worst suffering, the senior counselors watched her walk along the city wall and said, in their chirpy old men's voices, “There is no blame for Trojans or armored Achaians to suffer pains so long a time for such a woman” (156–7).”

So far I have been speaking Sappho's mind as I see it behind this poem. There is an interesting problem in lines 12ff., where most modern editors of Sappho's text have filled the gaps with anti-Helen sentiments, on the order of “but (Aphrodite) beguiled her . . . , for (women are easily manipulated,) light(-minded . . .).” We do not know what is missing, but it is more consistent with Sappho's perspective, as I read it, to keep the subject of *paragag'*, “beguiled,” the same as in the preceding clause – Helen. “Helen beguiled . . . itself (or, herself),” some feminine noun, such as “city” (*polis*), “blame” (*nemesis*), or the like. What is easily manipulated and light-minded (*kouphós*) are the senior staff of Troy, who astonishingly dismiss years of suffering as they breathe a romantic sigh when Helen passes.

Poem 31: Sappho Reading the Odyssey

Perhaps Sappho's most impressive fragment is poem 31:

That one seems to me to be like the gods, the man whosoever sits facing you and listens nearby to your sweet speech and desirable laughter – which surely terrifies the heart in my chest; for as I look briefly at you, so can I no longer speak at all, my tongue is silent, broken, a silken fire suddenly has spread beneath my skin, with my eyes I see nothing, my hearing hums, a cold sweat grips me, a trembling seizes me entire, more pale than grass am I, I seem to myself to be little short of dead. But everything is to be endured, since even a pauper . . .

The first stanza is a *makarismos*, a traditional formula of praise and well-wishing, “happy the man who . . .,” and is often used to celebrate the

prospect of a happy marriage (Snell; Koniaris; Saake 17–38). For instance, “That man is far and away blessed beyond all others who plies you with dowry and leads you to his house; for I have never seen with my eyes a mortal person like you, neither man nor woman. A holy dread grips me as I gaze at you” (*Odyssey* 6.158–61). In fact this passage from Odysseus’ speech to Nausikaa is so close in structure (*makarismos* followed by a statement of deep personal dread) to poem 31 that I should like to try the experiment of reading the beginning of Sappho’s poem as a re-creation of that scene from the *Odyssey*.

If Sappho is speaking to a young woman (“you”) as Nausikaa, with herself in the role of an Odysseus, then there are only two persons present in the imagined scene (Del Grande). This is certainly true to the emotional charge of the poem, in which the power and tension flow between Sappho and the woman she sees and speaks to, between “you” and “I.” The essential statement of the poem is, like the speech of Odysseus to Nausikaa, a lauding of the addressee and an abasement of the speaker which together have the effect of establishing a working relationship between two people of real power. The rhetoric of praise and of submission are necessary because the poet and the shipwrecked man are in fact very threatening. Most readers feel the paradox of poem 31’s eloquent statement of speechlessness, its powerful declaration of helplessness; as in poem 1, the poet is masterfully in control of herself as victim. The underlying relation of power then is the opposite of its superficial form: the addressee is of a delicacy and fragility which would be shattered by the powerful presence of the poet unless she makes elaborate obeisance, designed to disarm and, by a careful planting of hints, to seduce.

The anonymous “that man whosoever” (*kēnos onēr ottis* in Sappho, *keinos hos ke* in Homer) is a rhetorical cliché, not an actor in the imagined scene. Interpretations which focus on “that someone (male)” as a bridegroom (or suitor or friend) who is actually present and occupying the attention of the addressee miss the strategy of persuasion which informs the poem and in doing so reveal their own androcentric premises. In depicting “the man” as a concrete person central to the scene and god-like in power, such interpretations misread a figure of speech as a literal statement and thus add the weight of their own pro-male values to Sappho’s woman-centered consciousness. “That man” in poem 31 is like the military armament in poem 16, an introductory set-up to be dismissed. We do not imagine that the speaker of poem 16 is actually watching a fleet or infantry; no more need we think that Sappho is watching a man sitting next to her beloved. To whom, in that case, would Sappho be addressing herself? Such a reading makes poem 31 a

modern lyric of totally internal speech, rather than a rhetorically structured public utterance which imitates other well-known occasions for public speaking (prayer, supplication, exhortation, congratulation).

My reading of poem 31 explains why “that man” has assumed a grotesque prominence in discussions of it. Androcentric habits of thought are part of the reason, but even more important is Sappho’s intention to hint obliquely at the notion of a bridegroom just as Odysseus does to Nausikaa. Odysseus the stranger designs his speech to the princess around the roles which she and her family will find acceptable – helpless suppliant, valorous adventurer, and potential husband (Austin 1975: 191–200). The ordinary protocols of marital brokerage in ancient society are a system of discreet offers and counter-offers which must maintain at all times the possibility for saving face, for declining with honor and respect to all parties. Odysseus’ speech to Nausikaa contains these delicate approaches to the offer of marriage which every reader would appreciate, just as Alkinoos understands Nausikaa’s thoughts of marriage in her request to go wash her brothers’ dancing clothes: “So she spoke, for she modestly avoided mentioning the word ‘marriage’ in the presence of her father; but he understood her perfectly” (*Odyssey* 6.66f.). Such skill at innuendo and respectful obliquity is one of the ordinary-language bases for the refined art of lyric speech. Sappho’s hint that “someone” enjoys a certain happiness is, like Odysseus’ identical statement, a polite self-reference and an invitation to take the next step. Sappho plays with the role of Odysseus as suitor extraordinary, an unheard of stranger who might fulfill Nausikaa’s dreams of marriage contrary to all the ordinary expectations of her society. She plays too with the humble formalities of self-denigration and obeisance, all an expansion of *sebas m’echei eisoroōsa*, “holy dread grips me as I gaze on you” (*Odyssey* 6.161).

“That man is equal to the gods”: this phrase has another meaning too. Sappho as reader of the *Odyssey* participates by turn in all the characters; this alternation of attention is the ordinary experience of every reader of the epic and is the basis for Sappho’s multiple identification with both Aphrodite and Diomedes in *Iliad* 5. In reading *Odyssey* 6 Sappho takes on the roles of both Odysseus and Nausikaa, as well as standing outside them both. I suggest that “that man is equal to the gods,” among its many meanings, is a reformulation of Homer’s description of the sea-beaten Odysseus whom Athena transforms into a god-like man: *nun de theoisin coike toi ouranon eurun echousin*, “but now he is like the gods who control the expanse of heaven” (6.243). This is Nausikaa’s comment to her maids as she watches Odysseus sit on the shore after emerging from his bath, and she goes on to wish that her husband might be such.²¹ The

point of view from which Sappho speaks as one struck to the heart is that of a mortal visited by divine power and beauty, and this is located in the *Odyssey* in the personae of Odysseus (struck by Nausikaa, or so he says), of Nausikaa (impressed by Odysseus), and of the homeric audience, for Sappho speaks not only as the strange suitor and the beautiful princess but as the *Odyssey* reader who watches "that man" (Odysseus) face to face with the gently laughing girl.²²

In performing this experiment of reading Sappho's poems as expressing, in part, her thoughts while reading Homer, her consciousness of men's public world, I think of her being naturally drawn to the character of Nausikaa, whose romantic anticipation (6.27) and delicate sensitivity to the unattainability of the powerful stranger (244f., 276-84) are among the most successful presentations of a woman's mind in male Greek literature.²³ Sappho sees herself both as Odysseus admiring the nymph-like maiden and as Nausikaa cherishing her own complex emotions. The moment of their separation has what is in hindsight, by the normal process of re-reading literature in the light of its own reformulations, a "Sapphic" touch: *mnésēi emei*, "Farewell, guest, and when you are in your homeland remember me who saved you - you owe me this" (*Odyssey* 8.461-2). These are at home as Sappho's words in poem 94.6-8: "And I made this reply to her, 'Farewell on your journey, and remember me, for you know how I stood by you'" (Schadewaldt 1936: 367).

Gardens of Nymphs

The idyllic beauty of Phaiakia is luxuriously expressed in the rich garden of Alkinoos, whose continuously fertile fruits and blossoms are like the gardens which Sappho describes (esp. poems 2, 81b, 94, 96), and it reminds us of Demetrios' words, "Virtually the whole of Sappho's poetry deals with nymphs' gardens, wedding songs, eroticism." The other side of the public/private contrast in Sappho is a design hidden in the lush foliage and flower cups of these gardens. There are two sides to double consciousness: Sappho both re-enacts scenes from public culture infused with her private perspective as the enclosed woman and she speaks publicly of the most private, woman-centered experiences from which men are strictly excluded. They are not equal projects, the latter is much more delicate and risky. The very formulation of women-only secrets, female *arrhēta*, runs the risk not only of impropriety (unveiling the bride) but of betrayal by misstatement. Hence the hesitation in Sappho's most explicit delineation of double consciousness: *ouk oid' otti theō, dīcha moi ta*

noēmata, "I am not sure what to set down, my thoughts are double," could mean "I am not sure which things to set down and which to keep among ourselves, my mind is divided" (51).

Among the thoughts which Sappho has woven into her poetry, in a way which both conceals and reveals without betraying, are sexual images. These are in part private to women, whose awareness of their own bodies is not shared with men, and in part publicly shared, especially in wedding songs and rites, which are a rich store of symbolic images bespeaking sexuality (Bourdieu 1979: 105; Abbott chap. 11). The ordinary ancient concern with fertility, health, and bodily function generated a large family of natural metaphors for human sexuality and, conversely, sexual metaphors for plants and body parts. A high degree of personal modesty and decorum is in no way compromised by a daily language which names the world according to genital analogies or by marriage customs whose function is to encourage fertility and harmony in a cooperative sexual relationship.

The three words which I will use to illustrate this are *numphē*, *pteruges*, and *mélon*. The evidence for their usage will be drawn from various centuries and kinds of writing up to a thousand years after Sappho; but the terms in each case seem to be of a semi-technical and traditional nature rather than neologisms. They constitute the scattered fragments of a locally variegated, tenacious symbolic system which was operative in Sappho's time and which is still recognizable in modern Greece.

Numphē has many meanings: at the center of this extended family are "clitoris" and "bride." *Numphē* names a young woman at the moment of her transition from maiden (*parthenos*) to wife (or "woman," *gunē*); the underlying idea is that just as the house encloses the wife and as veil and carriage keep the bride apart from the wedding celebrants, so the woman herself encloses a sexual secret.²⁴ "The outer part of the female genital system which is visible has the name 'wings' (*pteruges*), which are, so to speak, the lips of the womb. They are thick and fleshy, stretching away on the lower side to either thigh, as it were parting from each other, and on the upper side terminating in what is called the *numphē*. This is the starting point (*archē*) of the wings (labia), by nature a little fleshy thing and somewhat muscular (or, mouse-like)" (Soranos *Gynaecology* 1.18).

The same technical use of *numphē* to mean clitoris is found in other medical writers²⁵ and lexicographers,²⁶ and by a natural extension is applied to many analogous phenomena: the hollow between lip and chin (Rufus *Onom.* 42, Pollux 2.90, Hesychios), a depression on the shoulder of horses (*Hippiatr.* 26), a mollusc (Speusippos ap. Athen. 3.105B), a niche (Kallixinos 2 = Müller *FHG* 3, p. 55), an opening rosebud,²⁷ the point of a

plow (Pollux 1.25.2; Proklos *ad Hesiod Erga* 425) – this last an interesting reversal based on the image of the plowshare penetrating the earth.

The relation of *numphê*, clitoris, to *pteruges*, wings/labia, is shown by the name of a kind of bracken, the *numphaia pteris*, “nymph’s-wing,” also known as *thelupteris*, “female wing,” by the name of the loose lapels on a seductively opening gown (Pollux 755, 62, 66 = Aristophanes frag. 325 OCT), and by the use of *numphê* as the name for bees in the larva stage just when they begin to open up and sprout wings (Aristotle *Hist. Anim.* 551.^b 2–4; Photios *Lexikon s.v. numphai*; Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 11.48).

This family of images extends broadly across many levels of Greek culture and serves to reconstruct for us one important aspect of the meaning of “bride,” *numphê* as the ancients felt it.²⁸ Hence the virtual identity of Demetrios’ three terms for Sappho’s poetry: nymphs’ gardens, wedding songs, eroticism. Several of Sappho’s surviving fragments and poems make sense as a woman-centered celebration and revision of this public but discreet vocabulary for women’s sexuality.

The consciousness of these poems ranges over a wide field of attitudes. The first, in fragment 105a, can be seen as Sappho’s version of male genital joking,²⁹ but when applied to the *numphê* Sappho’s female rib-dry is pointedly different in tone:

Like the sweet-apple [*glukumêlon*] ripening to red on the topmost branch,
on the very tip of the topmost branch, and the apple-pickers have
overlooked it –
no, they haven’t overlooked it but they could not reach it.

Mêlon, conventionally translated “apple,” is really a general word for fleshy fruit – apricots, peaches, apples, citron, quinces, pomegranates. In wedding customs it probably most often means quinces and pomegranates, but for convenience sake I will abide by the traditional translation “apple.” Like *numphê* and *pteruges*, *mêlon* has a wider extension of meanings, and from this we can rediscover why “apples” were a prominent symbol in courtship and marriage rites.³⁰ *Mêlon* signifies various “clitoral” objects: the seed vessel of the rose (Theophrastos *Hist. Plant.* 6.6.6), the tonsil or uvula,³¹ a bulge or sty on the lower eyelid (Hesychios *s.v. kula*), and a swelling on the cornea (Alexander Tralles *peri ophthalmôn*, ed. Puschmann, p. 152). The sensitivity of these objects to pressure is one of the bases for the analogy; I will quote just the last one. “And what is called a *mêlon* is a form of fleshy bump (*staphulôma*, grape-like or uvular swelling), big enough to raise the eyelids, and when it is rubbed it bothers the entire lid-surface.”

Fragment 105a, spoken of a bride in the course of a wedding song, is a sexual image. We can gather this sense not only from the general erotic meaning of “apples” but from the location of the solitary apple high up on the bare branches of a tree,³² and from its sweetness and color. The verb *ereuthô*, “grow red,” and its cognates are used of blood or other red liquid appearing on the surface of an object which is painted or stained or when the skin suffuses with blood (Hippokrates *Epid.* 2.3.1, *Morb. Sacr.* 15, *Morb.* 4.38 of a blush).

The vocabulary and phrasing of this fragment reveal much more than a sexual metaphor, however; they contain a delicate and reverential attitude to the elusive presence-and-absence of women in the world of men. Demetrios elsewhere (148) speaks of the graceful naivete of Sappho’s self-correction, as if it were no more than a charming touch of folk speech when twice in these lines she changes her mind, varying a statement she has already made. But self-correction is Sappho’s playful format for saying much more than her simile would otherwise mean. The words are inadequate – how can I say? – not inadequate, but they encircle an area of meaning for which there have not been faithful words in the phallogocentric tradition. The real secret of this simile is not the image of the bride’s “private” parts but of women’s sexuality and consciousness in general, which men do not know as women know. Sappho knows this secret in herself and in other women whom she loves, and she celebrates it in her poetry. Where men’s paraphernalia are awkwardly flaunted (bumping into the lintel, frag. 111, inconveniently large like a rustic’s feet, frag. 110), women’s are protected and secure. The amazing feature of these lines is that the apple is not “ripe for plucking” but unattainable, as if even after marriage the *numphê* would remain secure from the husband’s appropriation.³³

Revision of myth is combined with a sexual image in fragment 166: *phaisi dê pota Lédan uakinthôî pepukadmenon / eurên ôion*, “They do say that once upon a time Leda found an egg hidden in the hyacinth.” As the traditional denigration of Helen was revised in poem 16, so the traditional story of Helen’s mother is told anew. Leda was not the victim of Zeus’ rape who afterwards laid Helen in an egg, rather she discovered a mysterious egg hidden inside the frilly blossoms of a hyacinth stem, or (better) in a bed of hyacinths when she parted the petals and looked under the leaves. The egg discovered there is

- (1) a clitoris hidden under labia
- (2) the supremely beautiful woman, a tiny Helen, and
- (3) a story, object, and person hidden from male culture.³⁴

The metaphor of feeling one's way through the undergrowth until one discovers a special object of desire is contained in the word *maiomai*, "I feel for," "I search out by feeling." It is used of Odysseus feeling the flesh of Polyphemos' stomach for a vital spot to thrust in his sword (*Od.* 9.302), of animals searching through dense thickets for warm hiding places (Hesiod *Erga* 529–33), of enemy soldiers searching through the luxurious thicket for the hidden Odysseus (*Od.* 14.356), of Demeter searching high and low for her daughter (*Hom. Hymn* 2.44), of people searching for Poseidon's lover Pelops (Pindar *Ol.* 1.46). The contexts of this verb are not just similar by accident: *maiomai* means more than "search for," it means "ferret out," especially in dense thickets where an animal or person might be lurking.

In view of the consistency of connotations for this verb there is no reason to posit a shifted usage in Sappho 36, as the lexicon of Liddell, Scott and Jones does. As those lexicographers read it, Sappho's words *kai pothêô kai maomai* are redundant – "I desire you and I desire you." Rather they mean "I desire and I search out." I would like to include the physical sense of feeling carefully for hidden things or hiding places.³⁵ In the poetic verb *maiomai* there is a physical dimension to the expression of mutual passion and exploration. Desire and touching occur together as two aspects of the same experience: touching is touching-with-desire, desire is desire-with-touching.

The same dictionary which decrees a special meaning for *maiomai* when Sappho uses it invents an Aeolic word *matêmi* (B) = *pateô*, "I walk," to reduce the erotic meaning of a Lesbian fragment of uncertain authorship, Incert. 16: "The women of Krete once danced thus – rhythmically with soft feet around the desirable altar, exploring the tender, pliant flower of the lawn." *Matêmi* is a recognized Aeolic equivalent of *mateuô*, akin to *maiomai*. The meanings "ferret out," "search through undergrowth," "beat the thickets looking for game," "feel carefully" seem to me quite in place. Appealing to a long tradition, Sappho (whom I take to be the author) remarks that the sexual dancing of women, the sensuous circling of moving hands and feet around the erotic altar and combing through the tender valleys, is not only current practice but was known long ago in Krete.

I have been able to find no *simple* sexual imagery in Sappho's poems. For her the sexual is always something else as well. Her sacred landscape of the body is at the same time a statement about a more complete consciousness, whether of myth, poetry, ritual, or personal relationships. In the following fragment, 94, which contains a fairly explicit sexual statement in line 23 (West 322), we find Sappho correcting her friend's view of their relation.

... Without guile I wish to die. She left me weeping copiously and said, "Alas, what fearful things we have undergone, Sappho; truly I leave you against my will." But I replied to her, "Farewell, be happy as you go and remember me, for you know how we have stood by you. Perhaps you don't – so I will remind you ... and we have undergone beautiful things. With many garlands of violets and roses ... together, and ... you put around yourself, at my side, and flowers wreathed around your soft neck with rising fragrance, and ... you stroked the oil distilled from royal cherry blossoms and on tender bedding you reached the end of longing ... of soft ... and there was no ... nor sacred ... from which we held back, nor grove ... sound ..."

As usual the full situation is unclear, but we can make out a contrast of Sappho's view with her friend's. The departing woman says *deina peponthamen*, "fearful things we have suffered," and Sappho corrects her, *kal'epaschomen*, "beautiful things we continuously experienced." Her reminder of these beautiful experiences (which Page 1955: 83 calls a "list of girlish pleasures") is a loving progression of intimacy, moving in space – down along the body – and in time – to increasing sexual closeness: from flowers wreathed on the head to flowers wound around the neck to stroking the body with oil to soft bed-clothes and the full satisfaction of desire. I would like to read the meager fragments of the succeeding stanza as a further physical landscape: we explored every sacred place of the body. To paraphrase the argument, "When she said we had endured an awful experience, the ending of our love together, I corrected her and said it was a beautiful experience, an undying memory of sensual happiness that knew no limit, luxurious and fully sexual. Her focus on the termination was misplaced; I told her to think instead of our mutual pleasure which itself had no term, no stopping-point, no unexplored grove."

Poem 2 uses sacral language to describe a paradisaal place (Turyn) which Aphrodite visits:

Hither to me from Krete, unto this holy temple, a place where there is a lovely grove of apples and an altar where the incense burns, and here is water which ripples cold through apple branches, and all the place is shadowed with roses, and as the leaves quiver a profound quiet ensues. And here is a meadow where horses graze, spring flowers bloom, the honeyed whisper of winds. ... This is the very place where you, Kypris. ... drawing into golden cups the nectar gorgeously blended for our celebration, then pour it forth.

The grove, Page comments, is "lovely," a word used "elsewhere in the Lesbians only of *personal charm*" (1955: 36). But this place is, among other things, a personal place, an extended and multi-perspectived metaphor for women's sexuality. Virtually every word suggests a sensuous ecstasy in the service of Kyprian Aphrodite (apples, roses, quivering followed by repose, meadow for grazing, spring flowers, honey, nectar flowing). Inasmuch as the language is both religious and erotic, I would say that Sappho is not describing a public ceremony for its own sake but is providing a way to experience such ceremonies, to infuse the celebrants' participation with memories of lesbian sexuality. The twin beauties of burning incense on an altar and of burning sexual passion can be held together in the mind, so that the experience of either is the richer. The accumulation of topographic and sensuous detail leads us to think of the interconnection of all the parts of the body in a long and diffuse act of love, rather than the genital-centered and more relentlessly goal-oriented pattern of love-making which men have been known to employ.

I have tried to sketch two areas of Sappho's consciousness as she has registered it in her poetry: her reaction to Homer, emblematic of the male-centered world of public Greek culture, and her complex sexual relations with women in a world apart from men. Sappho seems always to speak in many voices—her friends', Homer's, Aphrodite's—conscious of more than a single perspective and ready to detect the fuller truth of many-sided desire. But she speaks as a woman to women: her eroticism is both subjectively and objectively woman-centered. Too often modern critics have tried to restrict Sappho's *erôs* to the strait-jacket of spiritual friendship.

A good deal of the sexual richness which I detect in Sappho's lyrics is compatible with interpretations such as those of Lasserre and Hallett 1979,³⁶ but what requires explanation is their insistent denial that the emotional lesbianism of Sappho's work has any physical component. We must distinguish between the physical component as a putative fact about Sappho in her own life and as a meaning central to her poems. Obviously Sappho as poet is not an historian documenting her own life but rather a creative participant in the erotic-lyric tradition.³⁷ My argument has been that this tradition includes pervasive allusions to physical *erôs* and that in Sappho's poems both subject and object of shared physical love are women. We now call this lesbian.³⁸ To admit that Sappho's discourse is lesbian but insist that she herself was not seems quixotic. Would anyone take such pains to insist that Anakreon in real life might not have felt any physical attraction to either youths or women?

It seems clear to me that Sappho's consciousness included a personal and subjective commitment to the holy, physical contemplation of the

body of Woman, as metaphor and reality, in all parts of life. Reading her poems in this way is a challenge to think both in and out of our time, both in and out of a phallogocentric framework, a reading which can enhance our own sense of this womanly beauty *as subject and as object* by helping us to un-learn our denials of it.

NOTES

- 1 English translation of *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes* (New York 1976). There are some uncritical myths in Wittig's own account of Sappho in her essay "Paradigm," in Stambolian and Marks 1979.
- 2 Lefkowitz 1973 and Hallett 1979 analyze the bias and distortions found in critical comments, ancient and modern, on Sappho.
- 3 Calder analyzes Welcker's treatise "Sappho Liberated from a Prevalent Prejudice" (1816), suggesting that Welcker's determination to prove that Sappho was not a lesbian can be traced to his idealization of the mother figures in his life (155–6).
- 4 This has now been done for the French tradition by DeJean.
- 5 My statement that this is Sappho's central topic throughout her nine books is based not merely on the few fragments (obviously), but on the ancient testimonies, especially those of Demetrios, who provided the original title of this essay ("... nymphs' gardens, wedding songs, eroticism—in short the whole of Sappho's poetry") and Himerios ("Sappho dedicated all of her poetry to Aphrodite and the Erotes, making the beauty and charms of a maiden the occasion for her melodies"). These and the other testimonia are collected in Gallavotti and Campbell.
- 6 There was also the category of heroic, exceptional woman, e.g. Herodotos' version of Artemisia, who is used to "prove the rule" every time he mentions her (7.99, 8.68, 8.87f., 8.101), and the stories collected by Plutarch *de virtutibus mulierum*. The stated purpose of this collection is to show that *aretê*, "virtue" or "excellence," is the same in men and women, but the stories actually show only that some women in times of crisis have stepped out of their regular anonymity and performed male roles when men were not available (Schaps 1982).
- 7 "A feminist theory of poetry would begin to take into account the context in history of these poems and their political connections and implications. It would deal with the fact that women's poetry conveys... a special kind of consciousness... Concentrating on consciousness and the politics of women's poetry, such a theory would evolve new ways of reading what is there" (Bernikow 10–1).

- 8 Consciousness of course is not a solid object which can be discovered intact like an easter egg lying somewhere in the garden (as in the Sapphic fragment 166 Leda is said to have found an egg hidden under the hyacinths). Sappho's lyrics are many-layered constructions of melodic words, images, ideas, and arguments in a formulaic system of sharable points of view (personas). I take it for granted that the usual distinctions between "the real Sappho" as author and speaker(s) of the poems will apply when I speak here of Sappho's consciousness.
- 9 In this territory and at these recitations women are present – Homer is not a forbidden text to women, not an arcane *arrhêton* of the male mysteries. In the *Odyssey* (1.325–9) Penelope hears and reacts to the epic poetry of a bard singing in her home, but her objections to his theme, the homecoming from Troy, are silenced by Telemakhos. Arete's decision to give more gifts to Odysseus (*Od.* 11.335–41) after he has sung of the women he saw in the Underworld may be an implicit sign of her approval of his poetry. Helen in *Iliad* 6 delights in the fact that she is a theme of epic poetry (357–8) and weaves the stories of the battles fought for her into her web (125–8).
- 10 The text of Sappho used here is that of Edgar Lobel and D. Page (abbreviated L-P), *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta* (Oxford 1955).
- 11 Homer seems to include this possibility in the range of performing *klea andrôn* ["deeds of men"] when he presents Achilles singing to his own *thumos* ["spirit"], while Patroklos sits in silence, not listening as an audience but waiting for Achilles to stop (*Il.* 9. 186–91).
- 12 Sappho is only one individual, and may have been untypical in her power to achieve a literary life and renown. Claims that society in her time and place allowed greater scope for women in general to attain a measure of public esteem are based almost entirely on Sappho's poems (including probably Plutarch *Lykourgos* 18.4, *Theseus* 19.3, Philostratos *Life of Apollonios* 1.30). The invention of early women poets is taken to extremes by Tatian in his *adversus Graecos* and by Ptolemy Chennos (Chapter Five, p. 143–4).
- 13 The evidence is found in Hephaistion *peri séméiôn* 138, quoted by Hooker 1977: 11.
- 14 Translations of Sappho in this chapter are my own; ellipses indicate that the Greek is incomplete.
- 15 As Boedeker shows for fragment 95: "a consciously 'anti-heroic' persona, specifically perhaps an anti-Odysseus. . . . The poem becomes a new personal statement of values, a denial and reshaping of epic-heroic ideals" (52).
- 16 We may take it as another measure of our distance from her that the pep and bite of the consonants in "Psappo," with all the p's sounded, have evaporated into the tired fizz of "Saffo."
- 17 Hesiod *Works and Days* 578–81. Clay suggests that the interpretation "but you bring the child away from its mother" could fit into a wedding song.
- 18 That would solve the problem felt at Theokritos 2.61, where editors emend *passó* to *massó*.

- 19 "The classic custom of wooing a damsel by throwing an apple into her lap still exists, though it is condemned by public opinion as improper, and is strongly resented by the maid's kinsfolk as an impertinence" (Abbott 147–8). Other literature is cited in n. 30 below.
- 20 E.g. J.B. Bury, "... while Sappho confined her muse within a narrower circle of feminine interests" (*Cambridge Ancient History* IV, 1953, 494f.) and similarly Werner Jaeger, *Paideia* (English translation, B. Blackwell, Oxford 1965) vol. 1, p. 132.
- 21 The comparison to gods runs throughout the Phaiakian scenes: Nausikaa (16, 105–9), her maids (18), the Phaiakians (241), Nausikaa's brothers, *athanatois enalinkioi* (7.5).
- 22 One could also experiment with reading the speaker's symptoms (fever, chill, dizziness) as the result of an erotic spell. . . . The deadening of the speaker's tongue (so beautifully contradicted, of course, by the eloquence and precision of the poet herself) is a typical affliction brought on by a *katadesmos*.
- 23 Apollonios of Rhodes' Medea is conscious of love in terms drawn from Sappho (Privitera), and note especially the characteristic presentation of Medea's mental after-images and imaginings (3.453–58, 811–6, 948–55), which is the technique of Sappho 1, 16, and 96.
- 24 "One of the men in Chios, apparently a prominent figure of some sort, was taking a wife and, as the bride was being conducted to his home in a chariot, Hippoklos the king, a close friend of the bridegroom, mingling with the rest during the drinking and laughter, jumped up into the chariot, not intending any insult but merely being playful according to the common custom. The friends of the groom killed him" Plutarch *mul. virt.* 244E.
- 25 Rufinus ap. Oribasios 3.391.1, Galen 2.370E, Aetios 16.103–4 (clitoridectomy), Paulus Aigin. 6.70 (clitoridectomy for lesbians).
- 26 Photios *Lexikon* s.v.; Pollux 2.174, with the anagram *skairon sarkion*, "throbbing little piece of flesh."
- 27 Photios *Lexikon*. s.v. *numphai*: "And they call the middle part of the female genitals the *numphê*; also the barely opened buds of roses are *numphai*; and newly-wed maidens are *numphai*." The equation of flowers and female genitals is ancient (Krinagoras *Anth. Pal.* 6.345, Achilles Tatius 2.1) and modern (art: Lippard, Dodson, Chicago 1975, 1979; poetry: Lorde, "Love Poem" in Bulkin and Larkin). Sappho appears to have made the equation of bride and roses explicit, according to Wirth.
- I would not reject the suggestion that Sappho's feelings for Kleis, as imagined in fragment 132, were given a consciously lesbian coloring: "I have a beautiful child, her shape is like that of golden *flowers*, beloved Kleis; in her place I would not. . . all Lydia nor lovely. . ." Indeed, taking it a step further, this "child" (*país*) may be simply another metaphor for clitoris (*Kleis/kleitōris*). The biographical tradition which regards Kleis as the name of Sappho's daughter and mother may be (as so often) based on

- nothing more than a fact-hungry reading of her poems. (The same name occurs at frag. 98b1.) On flowers and fruit see Stehle 1977.
- 28 For the connection of Nymphs to marriage and birth see Ballentine.
- 29 In her fragments 110 and 111: Kirk 1963, Killeen; fragment 121 may be "una variazione scherzosa nel nota fr. 105," Lanata 66.
- 30 Foster, McCartney, Trumpf 1960, Lugauer, Littlewood, Kakridis; P. Oxy. 2637, frag. 25.6; Abbott 147f., 170, 177.
- 31 Rufus *Onom.* 64; Galen *de usu partium* 15.3: "The part called *numpha* gives the same sort of protection to the uteri that the uvula gives to the pharynx, for it covers the orifice of their neck by coming down into the female pudendum and keeps it from being chilled." Sappho's fragment 42, on the warmth afforded by enfolding wings (*ptera*), may be read of labia as well as of birds.
- 32 "In other parts (of Macedonia) . . . , especially among the Wallachs, a pole with an apple on top and a white kerchief streaming from it . . . is carried by a kilted youth in front of the wedding procession" (Abbott 172).
- 33 This sense of *numphé* gives further meaning to a fragment of Praxilla, 754 in Page 1962. "Looking in beautifully through the windows, your head that of a maiden, but you are a *numphé* underneath," *ô dia tôn thuridôn kalon emblepoisa / parthene tan kephalan ta d'enerthe numpha*. Praxilla is, according to Aly's fine interpretation (RE 22 [1954] 176), addressing the moon shining through her windows (cp. Page 1962: 747, *selênaiês te prosôpon*); its mystery and elusive attraction are expressed by the image of a woman with a youthful, innocent face and a look that bespeaks deeper experience and knowledge. The physical comparison is to a woman whose face alone is visible: wrapped up under all those clothes, says Praxilla, is the body of a sexually mature woman. Page at the opposite extreme envisions a woman peeping into the windows of houses in order to attract other women's husbands (*quae more meretricio vagabunda per fenestras intueri soles, scilicet ut virum foras unde unde elicias*, Page 1962: 754 app. crit.). This level of significance may also be relevant to Page 1962: 286 (Ibykos) and 929 e-g (anonymous).
- 34 The verb *pukazô* refers not to just any kind of "hiding" but to covering an object with clothes, flower garlands, or hair, either as an adornment or for protection. "Thick" flowers (*huakinthon / puknon kai malakon*) cover the earth to cushion the love-making of Zeus and Hera (*Iliad* 14.347-50).
- 35 Fragment 48 may be read in a similar sense: *êlthes kai m' epothêsas egô de s' emaioman / on d' ephlexas eman phrena kaiiomenan pothôi*, "You came and you desired me; I searched you carefully; you stirred the fires of my feeling, smoldering with desire." *ephlexas* is Wesseling's conjecture for *phulaxas*; *m'epothêsas* is my conjecture for *epoêsas*. I would support this conjecture by reference back to fragment 36, which joins *potôh/* and *mai/*, and by the symmetry achieved: you desired me - I felt you - you stirred me - I desired you, which we might call Sapphic reciprocity. Cf. Lanata 79.

- 36 "Sarebbe augurabile che nelle allusioni all'amore saffico cadesse in disuso la sgradita definizione di 'turpe amore' inventata da un moralismo se non altro anacronistico," Gentili 1966: 48 n.55. Stehle 1979 is excellent.
- 37 Late Greek rhetoric maintains the tradition of praising a public official at a ceremonial event by a declaration of love. Himerios (48) and Themistios (13) tell their audiences that the honored official is their *erômenos*, boyfriend.
- 38 "Women who love women, who choose women to nurture and support and create a living environment in which to work creatively and independently, are lesbians" (Cook 738).

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Sappho

Born on the island of Lesbos in the second half of the seventh century BCE, Sappho originally composed nine books of poetry; only one complete poem (Sappho 1) and several substantial fragments survive. Although many of the poems concern the love between women, little is known about her personal life or about her relationship to the companions mentioned in her poems.

Sappho 1

O deathless Aphrodite on your patterned throne,
wile-weaving daughter of Zeus, I beg you,
do not overwhelm my heart,
O mistress, with suffering and sorrows,

but come here, if also before perceiving my voice
you listened from afar and came,
yoking your car
and leaving the golden house

of your father. Beautiful, swift sparrows
drew you over the dark earth
whirring their dense wings
through the middle of the shimmering air.

Swiftly you arrived, and you, O blessed goddess,
with a smile on your deathless face
asked, what again I suffered,
why again I called,

and what did I most wish to happen
in my maddened heart. "Whom now shall I persuade
to lead you back into her love? Who, O Sappho,
has hurt you?"

For if she flees, soon she will pursue,
if she refuses your gifts, soon she will give,
if she does not love, soon she will love,
even against her will.

Come to me even now, and release me from bitter
anguish. Accomplish all that my heart longs
to accomplish, and you yourself
be my ally!

Sappho 31

Equal to the gods seems that man to me,
who sits opposite you
and nearby listens to your sweet voice
and amorous laughter.

Then the heart within my breast trembles,
for when I look at you, even for a moment,
it is no longer possible
for me to speak;

my tongue has snapped into silence,
straight away a delicate fire runs under my skin.
there is no sight in my eyes,
my ears ring,

a cold sweat flows over my body
and trembling seizes all of me –
for I am greener than grass
and I seem close to death. . . .

Homer

In this passage from Homer's *Iliad* (c. 750 BCE), a poem about the escalating conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles in the final year of the Trojan war, the Greek hero Diomedes confronts a foe on the battlefield and prays to Athena, goddess of military strategy, for help. She promises to aid him, and even encourages him to wound Aphrodite, a goddess who belongs more to the bedroom than to the battlefield!

Homer, *Iliad* 5.114–32

Next Diomedes skilled at the war cry spoke,
 “Hear me, child of aegis-bearing Zeus, Atrytone,
 if ever before you stood with kindly thoughts near my father
 in hostile battle, now in turn be kind to me, Athena.
 Grant that going into the onslaught of the spear, I kill this man,
 who struck me by surprise and then vaunted, saying
 that I would no longer look upon the light of the sun!”
 So he spoke in prayer. And Pallas Athena heard him,
 and she made his limbs light again, both his feet and his arms above.
 Standing near him she uttered winged words:
 “Diomedes, dare now to enter into battle with the Trojans.
 For the strength of your father has come into your chest,
 unshakeable, such as the horseman, the shield-brandisher Tydeus had.
 I have taken the mist away from your eyes, which was there before,
 so that you may easily recognize god and mortal.
 Therefore, if a god comes forward and makes trial of you,
 do not battle directly with the rest of the immortal gods,
 but only if the daughter of Zeus, Aphrodite,
 goes into battle; her you may wound with the piercing bronze.”

Homer, *Odyssey* 6.139–85

Only the daughter of Alcinous remained. For Athena
 put courage into her chest, and took the fear from her limbs.
 She faced him and held her ground. Odysseus debated
 whether to supplicate the fair-faced girl, clasping her knees,
 or whether to stay where he was and beg her with gentle, persuasive words
 to show him the city and to give him clothing.

The latter plan seemed best to him as he pondered:
 to stay where he was and beg her with gentle, persuasive words,
 so that the maiden would not become angry at him for clasping her knees.
 Then straightaway he spoke in gentle, persuasive tones:
 “I am clasping your knees in supplication, lady. But tell me,
 are you a goddess or a mortal woman?
 If you are a goddess and have as your home broad heaven,
 you resemble most of all Artemis, daughter of mighty Zeus,
 in your features, stature and form.
 But if you are one of the mortals who live on earth,
 three times blessed are your father and your queenly mother,
 three times blessed are your brothers. Their heart
 always grows warm with pleasure at the thought of you,
 when they see their fair flower taking her place in the dance.
 But that man is most blessed above all others in his heart
 who leads you to his house, winning you with his bride gifts.
 For never have I laid eyes on such a creature,
 neither a man nor a woman. Awe overwhelms me as I gaze!
 Once in Delos I saw such a thing alongside the altar of Apollo,
 a sapling of young palm shooting up. I went there once,
 and a great army followed me on that journey
 which caused great suffering for me.
 And just as I marveled in my heart at that tree, looking for a long time,
 since such a trunk had never before sprung from the earth,
 so now I admire you, lady, and I marvel, and I am terribly afraid
 to clasp your knees. And yet hard sorrow comes upon me.
 Yesterday, after twenty days on the wine-dark sea, I escaped.
 Until then the waves and sweeping storms carried me
 from the island of Ogygia. Now a god has cast me ashore here,
 until I suffer some further evil. For I do not think my troubles
 will cease; before then the gods will accomplish many things.
 But take pity on me, lady. After suffering many evils,
 I have come first to you, nor do I know any of the other
 mortals who inhabit this city and land.
 Show me your city, give me a scrap to wear,
 if indeed you brought a covering for your laundry when you came here.
 And may the gods grant all that you desire in your heart,
 a husband and a home, and may they bless you with like-mindedness.
 For there is nothing better or more excellent
 than when two people manage a household with a united mind,
 the husband and wife together. They are a great grief to their foes,
 a joy to their friends, but they know it best themselves.”