

EXTRACT From:

IF NOT, WINTER

F R A G M E N T S O F S A P P H O

T R A N S L A T E D

B Y

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INTRODUCTION

ON SAPPHO

Sappho was a musician. Her poetry is *lyric*, that is, composed to be sung to the lyre. She addresses her lyre in one of her poems (fr. 118) and frequently mentions music, songs and singing. Ancient vase painters depict her with her instrument. Later writers ascribe to her three musical inventions: that of the *plectron*, an instrument for picking the lyre (*Suda*); that of the *pektis*, a particular kind of lyre (Athenaios *Deipnosophistai* 14.635b); and the mixolydian mode, an emotional mode also used by tragic poets, who learned it from Sappho (Aristoxenos cited by Plutarch *On Music* 16.113c). All Sappho's music is lost.

Sappho was also a poet. There is a fifth-century *hydria* in the National Museum of Athens that depicts Sappho, identified by name, reading from a papyrus. This is an ideal image; whether or not she herself was literate is unknown. But it seems likely that the words to her songs were written down during or soon after her lifetime and existed on papyrus rolls by the end of the fifth century B.C. On a papyrus roll the text is written in columns, without word division, punctuation or lineation. To read such a text is hard even when it comes to us in its entirety and most papyri don't. Of the nine books of lyrics that Sappho is said to have composed, one poem has survived complete. All the rest are fragments.

Sappho lived in the city of Mytilene on the island of Lesbos from about 630 B.C. It is not known when she died. Her exile to Sicily sometime between 604 and 595 B.C. is mentioned in an ancient inscription (the Parian Marble) but no reason for it is given. Biographical sources mention a mother, a father, a daughter, a husband and three brothers of Sappho. She appears to have devoted her life to composing songs; scholars in Alexandria collected them in nine books, of which the first book alone had 1320 lines. Most of this is lost. Her face was engraved on the coinage of Mytilene (see G. M. A. Richter, *Portraits of the Greeks*, 1.70–72) and Hellenistic poets called her “the tenth Muse” or “the mortal Muse” (see *Palatine Anthology* 9.506 and 7.14). The general tenor of ancient opinion on her work is summarized by a remark of Strabo:

Sappho [is] an amazing thing. For we know
in all of recorded history not one woman
who can even come close to rivaling her
in the grace of her poetry.

(13.2.3)

Controversies about her personal ethics and way of life have taken up a lot of people's time throughout the history of Sapphic scholarship. It seems that she knew and loved women as deeply as she did music. Can we leave the matter there? As Gertrude Stein says:

She ought to be a very happy woman. Now we are able to recognize a photograph. We are able to get what we want.

—"Marry Nettie," *Gertrude Stein Writings 1903–1932*
(New York, 1999), 461

ON THE TEXT

Breaks are always, and fatally, reinscribed in an old cloth that must continually, interminably be undone.

—J. Derrida, *Positions* (Chicago, 1981), 24

In general the text of this translation is based on *Sappho et Alcaeus: Fragmenta*, edited by Eva-Maria Voigt (Amsterdam, 1971). I include all the fragments printed by Voigt of which at least one word is legible; on occasion I have assumed variants or conjectures from her apparatus into my translation and these are discussed below (see Notes). In translating I tried to put down all that can be read of each poem in the plainest language I could find, using where possible the same order of words and thoughts as Sappho did. I like to think that, the more I stand out of the way, the more Sappho shows through. This is an amiable fantasy (transparency of self) within which most translators labor. If light appears

not ruining the eyes (as Sappho says)
but strengthening, nourishing and watering

—Aelius Aristides *Orations* 18.4

we undo a bit of the cloth.

ON MARKS AND LACKS

Sappho's fragments are of two kinds: those preserved on papyrus and those derived from citation in ancient authors. When translating texts read from papyri, I have used a single square bracket to give an impression of missing matter, so that] or [indicates destroyed papyrus or the presence of letters not quite legible somewhere in the line. It is not the case that every gap or illegibility is specifically indicated: this would render the page a blizzard of marks and inhibit reading. Brackets are an aesthetic gesture toward the papyrological event rather than an accurate record of it. I have not used brackets in translating passages, phrases or words whose existence depends on citation by ancient authors, since these are intentionally incomplete. I emphasize the distinction between brackets and no brackets because it will affect your reading experience, if you allow it. Brackets are exciting. Even though you are approaching Sappho in translation, that is no reason you should miss the drama of trying to read a papyrus torn in half or riddled with holes or smaller than a postage stamp—brackets imply a free space of imaginal adventure.

A duller load of silence surrounds the bits of Sappho cited by ancient scholiasts, grammarians, metricians, etc., who want a dab of poetry to decorate some proposition of their own and so adduce *exempla* without context. For instance, the second-century-A.D. grammarian Apollonios Dyskolos, who composed a treatise *On Conjunctions* in which he wished to make a point about the spelling of the interrogative particle in different dialects of ancient Greek, cites from Sappho this verse:

Do I still long for my virginity?

—Apollonios Dyskolos *On Conjunctions* 490 = Sappho fr. 107 Voigt

Whose virginity? It would be nice to know whether this question comes from a wedding song (and so likely an impersonation of the voice of the bride) or not (and so possibly a personal remark of Sappho's). Apollonios Dyskolos is not interested in such matters. Or consider the third-century-B.C. philosopher Chrysippos whose treatise *On Negatives* includes this negation from Sappho:

Not one girl I think who looks on the light of the sun will ever have wisdom like this.

—Chrysippos *On Negatives* 13 = Sappho fr. 56 Voigt

Wisdom like what? And who is this girl? And why is Sappho praising her? Chrysippos is not concerned with anything except Sappho's sequence of negative adverbs. There is also the second-century-A.D. lexicographer Pollux whose lexicon includes the following entry:

A word *beudos* found in Sappho is the same as the word *kimberikon* which means a short transparent dress.

—Pollux 7.49 = Sappho fr. 177 Voigt

Who would not like to know more about this garment? But the curiosity of Pollux is strictly lexical. In translating such stranded verse I have sometimes manipulated its spacing on the page, to restore a hint of musicality or suggest syntactic motion. For example the sentence cited by Chrysippos becomes:

not one girl I think
who looks on the light of the sun
will ever
have wisdom
like this

This is a license undertaken in deference to a principle that Walter Benjamin calls “the intention toward language” of the original. He says

The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original. . . . Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the center of the language forest but on the outside; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one.

—W. Benjamin, “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,”
originally a preface to Benjamin's translation
of Baudelaire (Heidelberg, 1923), 77

I am never quite sure how to hear Sappho's echo but, now and again, reading these old citations, there is a tingle.

So far we have looked at examples of citation without context. Still more haunting are instances of context without citation. Some wonderful night of Sappho's life, not to say the prayer that it evoked, survives only as an allusion of the fourth-century-A.D. orator Libanius:

So if nothing prevented the Lesbian Sappho from praying that her night be made twice as long, let it be permitted me too to pray for something like this.

—Libanius *Orations* 12.99 = Sappho fr. 197 Voigt

Some song of Sappho's that Solon heard sung by a boy is mentioned in an anecdote of Stobaios but Stobaios omits to tell us what song it was:

Solon of Athens heard his nephew sing a song of Sappho's over the wine and since he liked the song so much he asked the boy to teach it to him. When someone asked why he said, *So that I may learn it then die.*

—Stobaios *Florilegium* 3.29.58

Some shrewd thinking of Sappho's about death is paraphrased by Aristotle:

Sappho says that to die is evil: so the gods judge. For they do not die.

—Aristotle *Rhetoric* 1398b = Sappho fr. 201 Voigt

As acts of deterrence these stories carry their own kind of thrill—at the inside edge where her words go missing, a sort of antipoem that condenses everything you ever wanted her to write—but they cannot be called texts of Sappho's and so they are not included in this translation.

APPENDIX: SOME EXEMPLARY TESTIMONIA

The fourth-century-b.c. comic poet Antiphanes produced a comedy called *Sappho* in which Sappho appears as a character and poses this riddle with its answer:

There is a female creature who hides in her womb unborn children,
and although the infants are voiceless they cry out across the waves
of the sea
and over the whole earth to whomever they wish
and people who are not present and even deaf people can hear them.
The female creature is a letter
and the infants she carries are the letters of the alphabet:
although voiceless they can speak to those far away,
to whomever they wish whereas if someone happens to be
standing right next to the reader he will not hear.

—*Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta* fr. 196 Kock

On the riddle see Y. Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton, 1999), 23–7; J. Svenbro, *Phrasikleia*, translated by J. Lloyd (Ithaca, 1993), 158–86.

Three poems of the *Palatine Anthology* are ascribed to Sappho (probably wrongly):

Children, although I am voiceless I answer anyone who asks
since I have a tireless voice set at my feet:
to Aithopia daughter of Leto I was dedicated by Arista
daughter of Hermokleides son of Saunaiadas.
She is your handmaid, queen of women. Rejoice in her
and be gracious to our famous family.

6.269

Of Timas here is the dust, dead before marriage,
received in Persephone's darkblue chamber
and when she died all her friends with newsharpened knife
took the lovely hair from their heads.

7.489

On the tomb of Pelagon his father Meniskos put
basket and oar, memories of sad life.

7.505

•
Data on the mysterious Phaon:

Phaon had no life except his boat and his sea. His sea was a strait. No one complained, since he was in fact a moderate man and accepted money only from the rich. There was amazement among the Lesbians about his way of life. The goddess (they mean Aphrodite) wanted to thank this man so she put on the appearance of an old woman and asked Phaon about crossing the strait. He at once carried her across and asked nothing in return. What did the goddess do then? She transformed him (they say) from an old man—repaid him with youth and beauty. This is the Phaon whom Sappho loved and celebrated in lyric song.

—Palaiphatos *On Incredible Things* 211a

The temple of Apollo at Leukas [is the site of] the leap believed to put an end to desire: "where Sappho first of all" (so Menander says) "pursuing proud Phaon was so stung by love that she threw herself from the far-seen cliff. . . ." So it was the custom among the Leukadians at the annual festival of Apollo that some criminal be thrown from the cliff, with all kinds of wings and birds fastened to him to break his fall and many people in small boats waiting below in a circle to save him and take him off beyond the borders.

—Strabo *Geography* 10.2.9; see also Menander fr. 258 Koerte

Phaon the most beautiful of men was hid by Aphrodite amid lettuces.

—Aelian *Historical Miscellanies* 12.18

Kallimachos says Aphrodite hid Adonis in a bed of lettuces. . . . Euboulos in *The Impotent Men* says: “. . . for it was amid vegetables, so the story goes, that the Kyprian laid out dead Adonis.” Kratinos says that when Aphrodite fell in love with Phaon she hid him among “beautiful lettuces.” Marsyas says it was green barley.

—Athenaios *Deipnosophistai* 2.69e–d

Sappho has left a written record that dead Adonis was laid out among lettuces by Aphrodite.

—Comes Natalis *Mythology* 5.16

Strange lore about the plant called *ēryngē* (“sea holly”): its root takes the shape of the male or the female sex organ. It is rarely found but if men happen upon the male shape they become desirable; on this account Phaon of Lesbos was desired by Sappho.

—Pliny *Natural History* 22.20

Many people say Sappho fell in love with Phaon—not Sappho the poet but [some other] Lesbian woman—and when she didn’t get him she threw herself off the cliff of Leukas.

—Photios *Lexicon*

A second-century-A.D. papyrus furnishes a putative list of first words of poems by Alkaios, Anakreon or Sappho:

here to me island
two loves me
we stand prayer
O you who welcomed
holy much-
queen of heaven
Eros was entertained
here blessed ones
who of desire
already profit

hail you of Kyllene
the big sea
let us sacrifice to Aphrodite
to Danaos
holy mother
Kyprian
let Aphrodite set free
let her awake
varied voice
keep away the wind
sweet
hail hail
I saw
I entreat
new
O child
come
O

The *Palatine Anthology* includes two epitaphs for Sappho:

On Sappho you lie, Aeolian earth, who amid the immortal
Muses sings as a mortal Muse,
whom Kypris and Eros reared together, with whom Persuasion
wove an everliving Pierian crown,
for Greece a delight, for you a glory. O Fates who twist
triple thread on your spindle,
how is it you did not spin out an utterly deathless day
for the one who devised deathless gifts of the Muses?

—Antipater of Sidon *Palatine Anthology* 7.14

As you bypass the Aeolian tomb, stranger, do not say I am dead,
I the songmaker of Mytilene.
For hands of men made this and such human works
vanish into quick oblivion.

But if you rate me by the grace of the Muses, from each of whom
I put a flower beside my own nine,
you will realize I escaped the shadowland of Hades nor will there be
a sunlit day that lacks the name of lyric Sappho.

—Tullius Laurea *Palatine Anthology* 7.17

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Last word from Seneca:

Didymus the grammarian wrote four thousand books: I would feel sorry for him if he had merely *read* so much verbiage. His books investigate questions like the birthplace of Homer, the real mother of Aeneas, if Anakreon was more of a lecher than a drunk, whether Sappho was a whore, etc. etc. etc. And people complain that life is short!

—*Epistles* 88.37

IF NOT, WINTER

Deathless Aphrodite of the spangled mind,
 child of Zeus, who twists lures, I beg you
 do not break with hard pains,

O lady, my heart

but come here if ever before
 you caught my voice far off
 and listening left your father's
 golden house and came,

yoking your car. And fine birds brought you,
 quick sparrows over the black earth
 whipping their wings down the sky
 through midair—

they arrived. But you, O blessed one,
 smiled in your deathless face
 and asked what (now again) I have suffered and why
 (now again) I am calling out

and what I want to happen most of all
 in my crazy heart. Whom should I persuade (now again)
 to lead you back into her love? Who, O
 Sappho, is wronging you?

For if she flees, soon she will pursue.
If she refuses gifts, rather will she give them.
If she does not love, soon she will love
even unwilling.

Come to me now: loose me from hard
care and all my heart longs
to accomplish, accomplish. You
be my ally.

Some men say an army of horse and some men say an army on foot
 and some men say an army of ships is the most beautiful thing
 on the black earth. But I say it is
 what you love.

Easy to make this understood by all.

For she who overcame everyone
 in beauty (Helen)

 left her fine husband

behind and went sailing to Troy.

Not for her children nor her dear parents

had she a thought, no—

]led her astray

]for

]lightly

]reminded me now of Anaktoria

 who is gone.

]of desire
]
]for when I look at you
]such a Hermione
]and to yellowhaired Helen I liken you
]
]among mortal women, know this
]from every care
]you could release me
]
]dewy riverbanks
]to last all night long
] [

24A

]

]you will remember

]for we in our youth

did these things

yes many and beautiful things

]

]

]

24C

]

]we live

]

the opposite

]

daring

]

]

]

] , έδαφο[

]αικατε[

]ανέλο[

]

] , [] , αι

λ]επτοφών[

] , εα , [

24D

]

]

]

]

]

]in a thin voice

]

]γμε.ι

]προλιπ[

]νυᾶςεπ[

ᾶ]βρα·

ἐ]γλάθαν' ἐς[

]ηςμεθα[

]γυνθαλα[

]

]quit

]

]luxurious woman

]

]

]

]frequently

]for those

I treat well are the ones who most of all

]harm me

]crazy

]

]

]

]you, I want

]to suffer

]in myself I am

aware of this

]

]

]

night[

girls

all night long

might sing of the love between you and the bride

with violets in her lap

wake! and go call

the young men so that

no more than the bird with piercing voice

shall we sleep

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

and lovely laughing—oh it
 puts the heart in my chest on wings
 for when I look at you, even a moment, no speaking
 is left in me

no: tongue breaks and thin
 fire is racing under skin
 and in eyes no sight and drumming
 fills ears

and cold sweat holds me and shaking
 grips me all, greener than grass
 I am and dead—or almost
 I seem to me.

But all is to be dared, because even a person of poverty

who honored me
by giving their works

stars around the beautiful moon
hide back their luminous form
whenever all full she shines
on the earth

silvery

you either Kypros or Paphos or Panormos

I long and seek after

in my dripping (pain)

the blamer may winds and terrors
carry him off

you burn me

the feet
by spangled straps covered
beautiful Lydian work

but I to you of a white goat

and I will pour wine over

for you beautiful ones my thought
is not changeable

]αἰ·

]

]λεται

] [[κ]]αλος

]. ἄκαλα κλόνει

] κάματος φρένα

]ε κατιςδάνε[ι]

] ἀλλ' ἄγιτ', ὦ φίλαι,

], ἄγχι γὰρ ἀμέρα.

]

]

]

]beautiful he

]stirs up still things

]exhaustion the mind

]settles down

]but come O beloveds

]for day is near

you came and I was crazy for you
and you cooled my mind that burned with longing

I loved you, Atthis, once long ago

a little child you seemed to me and graceless

For the man who is beautiful is beautiful to see
but the good man will at once also beautiful be.

I don't know what to do

two states of mind in me

I would not think to touch the sky with two arms

pure Graces with arms like roses

come here daughters of Zeus

having come from heaven wrapped in a purple cloak

Dead you will lie and never memory of you
will there be nor desire into the aftertime—for you do not
share in the roses
of Pieria, but invisible too in Hades' house
you will go your way among dim shapes. Having been breathed out.

not one girl I think
 who looks on the light of the sun
 will ever
 have wisdom
 like this

what country girl seduces your wits
wearing a country dress
not knowing how to pull the cloth to her ankles?

I simply want to be dead.

Weeping she left me

with many tears and said this:

Oh how badly things have turned out for us.

Sappho, I swear, against my will I leave you.

And I answered her:

Rejoice, go and

remember me. For you know how we cherished you.

But if not, I want

to remind you

]and beautiful times we had.

For many crowns of violets

and roses

]at my side you put on

and many woven garlands

made of flowers

around your soft throat.

sweet mother I cannot work the loom

I am broken with longing for a boy by slender Aphrodite

do I still yearn for my virginity?

virginity

virginity

where are you gone leaving me behind?

no longer will I come to you

no longer will I come

NOTES

1.1 “of the spangled mind”: two different readings of the first word of Sappho’s first fragment have descended to us from antiquity: *poikilothron*’ (printed by Lobel, Page, Campbell and Voigt) and *poikilophron* (printed here). The word is a compound adjective, used as an epithet of Aphrodite to identify either her “chair” (*thron-*) or her “mind” (*phron-*) as *poikilos*: “many-colored, spotted, dappled, variegated, intricate, embroidered, inlaid, highly wrought, complicated, changeful, diverse, abstruse, ambiguous, subtle.” Now certainly the annals of ancient furniture include some fancy chairs, especially when gods sit on them; and initial mention of her throne provides an elegant point of departure for the downrush of Aphrodite’s next motion. On the other hand, it is Aphrodite’s agile mind that seems to be at play in the rest of the poem and, since compounds of *thron-* are common enough in Greek poetry to make this word predictable, perhaps Sappho relied on our ear to supply the chair while she went on to spangle the mind.

Other examples of the adjective *poikilos* or its compounds occur in Sappho frs. 39.2, 44.9, 98a11, 98b1, 98b6; cf. also Alkaios fr. 345.2 (of a bird’s throat) and fr. 69.7 (of a man with a mind like a fox).

1.15, 16, 18 “(now again)”: the parentheses are not Sappho’s but I want to mark her use of the temporal adverb *dēute*. It is probably no accident that, in a poem about the cyclical patterns of erotic experience, this adverb of repetition is given three times. (Also repeated are the adjective that characterizes Aphrodite’s relation to time—“deathless,” occurring twice; Aphrodite’s questions to Sappho, refracted four ways; and Aphrodite’s final erotic rule, given three formulations.) The adverb is a compound of two words, *dē* and *aute*, contracted for euphonic reasons into *dēute*. *Dē* is a particle signifying vividly that some event is taking place in the present moment; it strikes a note of powerful alert emotion (sometimes with a tinge of irony or skepticism), like English “Well now!” *Aute* is an adverb that peers past the present moment to a series of repeated actions stretching behind; it intercepts the new and binds it into history, as if to say “Not for the first time!” Sappho’s “(now again)” does more than mark repetition as a theme of her poem, it

instantiates the difference between mortal and immortal perspectives on this painful feature of erotic life: Sappho is stuck in the pain of the “now,” Aphrodite calmly surveys a larger pattern of “agains.”

For other instances of the adverb *dēute* in Sappho see fr. 22.11; 83.4; 127; 130.1.

1.18–24 Sappho's reverie goes transparent at the center when she shifts midverse to direct speech of Aphrodite. There is an eerie casualness to the immortal voice simply present within Sappho's own, which some translators modify with quotation marks or italics. This poem is cast in the form of a hymn or prayer, how straightforwardly is hard to say. Hymnic features include the opening catalogue of divine epithets, central reverie concerned with former epiphanies of the god, repetition of a plea at the beginning and the end (“come here . . . come to me”). For other literary examples of prayers see Homer *Iliad* 5.116ff; 10.284ff; 16.233ff; Pindar *Isthmians* 6.42ff; Sophokles *Oedipus the King* 163ff; Aristophanes *Thesmophoriazousai* 1156ff.

16.1–4 “some men say . . . some men say . . . some men say . . . but I say”: Sappho begins with a rhetorical device called a priamel, whose function is to focus attention and to praise. The priamel’s typical structure is a list of three items followed by a fourth that is different and better. Sappho’s list marshals three stately masculine opinions, then curves into dissent. Her dissent will solidify as Helen in the next stanza.

On the priamel see B. Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind*, translated by T. G. Rosenmeyer (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), 47–50; A. P. Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets: Archilochus, Alcaeus, Sappho* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 281–5; W. H. Race, *The Classical Priamel from Homer to Boethius* (Leiden, 1982); J. J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire* (New York, 1990), 176–7; and cf. Bakkhylides 3.85–92; Pindar *Olympians* 1.1–7; Plato *Lysis* 211d–e; Tyrtaios 9.1–14 West.

16.12–16 Because of the corruption of these central verses it is impossible to say who led Helen astray (could be Aphrodite, Eros, or some principle of delusion like Atē) or how Sappho managed the transition from Helen to Anaktoria “who is gone.” It is a restless and strangely baited poem that seems to gather its logic into itself rather than pay it out. Rather like Helen. Beauty comes out of unexpectedness, and stares at us, “as though we were the ones who’d made a mistake,” as Yannis Ritsos says in a poem “Expected and Unexpected” in *Ritsos in Parentheses*, translated by E. Keeley (Princeton, 1979), 160–1.

31.9 “tongue breaks”: the transmitted text contains a hiatus (conjunction of two open vowels) between “tongue” (*glōssa*) and “breaks” (*eage*) that contravenes the rules of Greek metrics and convinces most editors to mark the verse as corrupt. On

the other hand, the hiatus creates a ragged sound that may be meant to suggest breakdown.

For various ways of reading Sappho's broken tongue, see G. Nagy, *Comparative Studies in Greek and Indic Meter* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), 45; D. O'Higgins, "Sappho's Splintered Tongue," *American Journal of Philology* 111 (1990), 156–67; Y. Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton, 1999), 28–73; J. Svenbro, *Phrasikleia*, translated by J. Lloyd (Ithaca, 1993), 152.

31.17 The poem has been preserved for us by the ancient literary critic Longinus (*On the Sublime* 10.1–3), who quotes four complete Sapphic stanzas, then the first verse of what looks like a fifth stanza, then breaks off, no one knows why. Sappho's account of the symptoms of desire attains a unity of music and sense in vv. 1–16, framed by verbs of seeming ("he seems to me," "I seem to me"), so if the seventeenth verse is authentic it must represent an entirely new thought. It is worth noting that Catullus' translation of the poem into Latin includes, at just this point, an entirely new thought.

Longinus' admiration for Sappho's poem is keen. He finds in it an example of a certain mode of sublimity, which is able to select the most extreme sensations of an event and combine these together "as if into one body," as he says (*On the Sublime* 10.1). He elaborates:

Are you not amazed at how she researches all at once the soul the body the ears the tongue the eyes the skin all as if they had departed from her and belong to someone else? And contradictorily in one instant she chills, she burns, is crazy and sensible, for she is in terror or almost dead. So that no single passion is apparent in her but a confluence of passions. And her selection (as I said) of the most important elements and her combination of these into a whole achieves excellence.

—*On the Sublime* 10.3

Sappho's body falls apart, Longinus' body comes together: drastic contract of the sublime.

34.5 "silvery": the adjective is not part of the text of this poem as quoted (vv. 1–4) by the grammarian Eustathios in his commentary on *Iliad* 8.555, but has been added because the Roman emperor Julian refers to the poem in a letter to the sophist Hekebolios:

Sappho . . . says the moon is silver and so hides the other stars from view.

—Julian *Epistles* 387a

On Julian cf. fr. 48, 163 and note to fr. 140 below.

37 These two bits of text are cited as Sappho's by the *Etymologicum Genuinum* in a discussion of words for pain: "And the Aeolic writers call pain a dripping . . . because it drips and flows." For "dripping" Sappho has the noun *stalygmon*, cognate with the verb *stazei* ("drips") used by Aeschylus in a passage of *Agamemnon* where the chorus is describing its own nocturnal anxiety:

And it drips in sleep before my heart
the grief-remembering pain.

(179–80)

We might compare this physiology of pain with the sensations noted by Hamm in Beckett's *Endgame*:

There's something dripping in my head.

(Pause.)

A heart in my head.

There's something dripping in my head, ever since the fontanelles.

(Stifled hilarity of Nagg.)

Splash, splash, always on the same spot.

—Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (New York, 1958), 18 and 50.

38 Translation of this fragment raises the problem of pronouns in Sappho. Her Greek text actually says "us" not "me." Slippage between singular and plural in pronouns of the first person is not uncommon in ancient poetry; the traditional explanation is that much of this poetry was choral in origin, that is, performed by a chorus of voices who collectively impersonate the voice that speaks in the poem. A glance at Sappho's fragments 5, 21, 24a, 94, 96, 147, 150, all of which employ a first-person-plural pronoun where the modern ear expects singular, will show the extent of the phenomenon. I translate "us" as "us" in all those other examples. But the fragile heat of fr. 38 seems to me to evaporate entirely without a bit of intervention.

On the other hand, I may be reading this sentence all wrong. Erotic fire has a history, not only in Sappho (see fr. 48) but also in later lyric poets (e.g., Anakreon fr. 413 *PMG* and Pindar *Pythians* 4. 219). The verb I have rendered as “burn” can also be translated “bake, roast, broil, boil” and so suggest a concrete figure for the “cooking” of passion that is to be found in Hellenistic literature, e.g., in an epigram of Meleager who pictures Eros as “cook of the soul” (*Palatine Anthology* 12.92.7–8; cf. also Theokritos *Idylls* 7.55 and Kallimachos *Epigrams* 43.5). If burning means cooking and “you” is Eros, this becomes a very different poem—a cry to the god who plays with fire from the community of souls subjected to its heat.

Further on the phenomenology of desire in Sappho see G. Lanata “Sul linguaggio amoroso di Saffo,” *Quaderni urbinati di cultura classica* 2 (1966), 63–79, translated by W. Robins in E. Greene, ed., *Reading Sappho* (Berkeley, 1996), 11–25.

48 The Roman emperor Julian cites this sentence in a letter that begins:

You came yes you did—thanks to your letter you arrived even though you were absent.

—*Epistles* 240 b–c

Julian's letter is addressed to Iamblichos, chief exponent of the Syrian school of neoplatonism, and is regarded as apocryphal because Iamblichos will have died when Julian was a child. More interesting is the problem of erotic temperature raised by emendations to the text of the main verb in the second line, which appears as *ephylaxas* ("you guarded, kept safe") in the codices—a reading that is unmetrical and therefore emended either to *ephlexas* ("you inflamed": Wesseling) or *epsyxas* ("you cooled": Thomas).

49 The first verse is cited by Hephaestion in his *Handbook* on meters (7.7) as an example of dactylic pentameter, the second verse by Plutarch in his treatise *On Love* (751d) as an example of a remark to a girl too young for marriage. A third citation by the grammarian Terentianus Maurus suggests the two verses go together.

50 Galen commends this sentiment in his *Exhortation to Learning* (8.16):

So since we know the ripeness of youth is like spring flowers and brings brief pleasure, admire Sappho for saying . . .

51 Chrysippos cites this sentence in his treatise *On Negatives* (23). Bruno Snell's by now notorious discovery of *The Discovery of the Mind* in this Sapphic fragment is still worth considering for its irritant value. *The Discovery of the Mind*, translated by T. G. Rosenmeyer (Cambridge, Mass., 1953).

52 Herodian's citation of this sentence in his treatise *On Anomalous Words* ends with some letters no longer legible that may be something like "with my two arms."

53 The Graces (*Charites* in Greek, derived from *charis*: "grace") are three in number, embodiments of beauty or charm, companions of the Muses and attendants of Aphrodite.

54 Pollux cites this phrase in his *Onomastikon* (10.124) for its use of a new word for “cloak” (*chlamys*) and also reports that Sappho is talking here about Eros.

55.2–3 “the roses of Pieria”: Pieria is a mountainous region in northern Greece which was believed to be the birthplace of the Muses; the works of the Muses—music, dance, poetry, learning, culture—are symbolized by their roses. Plutarch tells us this poem was addressed to a woman wealthy but *amousos* (“without the Muses,” indifferent to their works). But the works of the Muses are also the substance of memory. Sappho’s poem threatens the woman with an obliteration which it then enacts by not naming her.

55.3 “too”: Sappho’s word *kan* is a contraction of *kai + en* for metrical purpose (to save a beat of time) but its effect is also conceptual—to syncopate some woman’s posthumous nonentity upon her present life without roses.

55.1–4 “Dead. . . Having been breathed out”: a participle in the aorist tense (*katthanoisa*) begins the poem and a participle in the perfect tense (*ekpepotamena*) ends it. The aorist tense expresses past action as a point of fact; the perfect tense renders past action whose effect continues into the future; so does Sappho’s poem softly exhale some woman from the point of death into an infinitely featureless eternity. Cognate with words for wings, flying, fluttering and breath, the participle *ekpepotamena*, with its spatter of plosives and final open vowel, sounds like the escape of a soul into nothingness.

56 Chryssippos cites these lines (as prose) in his treatise *On Negatives* (13). The word translated “wisdom” (*sophia*) may connote “skill” or “learning” of any kind—possibly poetic skill.

57 Amid a collection of sartorial anecdotes Athenaios cites the first and third lines of this fragment, informing us that Sappho is making fun of Andromeda as Plato does of “men who do not know how to throw their cloak over their shoulder from left to right nor how to put words together in proper harmony for praising gods and men” (*Theaetetus* 175e; *Deipnosophistai* 21b–c). The second verse of the fragment comes from Maximus of Tyre (*Orations* 18.9), who compares Sappho’s comment on Andromeda with Sokrates’ satire of the sophists’ fashion sense

turned up on a papyrus along with the beginnings of four other verses (=82b). For Gyrinno (if she is the same person as Gyrinna) see note on fr. 8 above.

94.1 “to be dead” or “to have died”: the poem’s first word is a perfect active infinitive denoting a past action (death) that slides into the present (as death wish). Sliding from past to present, from present to past, is Sappho’s method in this poem and she seems to offer it (the sliding screen of memory) as a consolation to the woman who weeps while going. Because the beginning of the poem is lost, as the metrical scheme indicates, it remains unclear whether it is Sappho or the weeping woman who wishes for death.

See G. Lanata, “Sul linguaggio amoroso di Saffo,” *Quaderni urbinati di cultura classica* 2 (1966), 63–79, translated by W. Robins in E. Greene, ed., *Reading Sappho* (Berkeley, 1996), 19–20; T. McEvilley, “Sappho Fr. 94,” *Phoenix* 25 (1971), 1–11; E. Robbins, “Who’s Dying in Sappho Fr. 94?” *Phoenix* 44 (1990), 111–21; J. M. Snyder, *The Woman and the Lyre* (Carbondale, 1989), 26.

WHO'S WHO

Abanthis: woman about whom nothing is known

Acheron: river of Hades

Adonis: young man loved by Aphrodite whose cult was popular with women and had something to do with lettuce

Aelian: (Claudius Aelianus) writer of miscellanies 170–235 A.D.
Hercher, ed., *Varia Historia*

Aelius Aristides: rhetorician of the second century A.D.
Keil, ed., *Orationes*

Aiga: promontory of Asia Minor

Alkaios: lyric poet who lived on the island of Lesbos in the seventh century B.C.
Voigt, ed., *Sappho et Alcaeus Fragmenta*

Anakreon: lyric poet of Teos 575–490 B.C.
Page, ed., *Poetae Melici Graeci*

Anaktoria: possibly a companion of Sappho, see fr. 16 and fr. 8 note

Andromache: wife of Hektor at Troy

Andromeda: possibly a companion of Sappho, see fr. 68a and fr. 8 note

Antiphanes: comic poet of the fourth century B.C.
Kock, ed., *Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta*, vol. 2

Aphrodite: goddess of love, sex and desire

Apollonios Dyskolos: grammarian of the second century A.D. who is said to have been given the name Dyskolos (“hard to digest”) because of the toughness of his subject matter

Schneider-Uhlig, eds., *Grammatici Graeci*, vol. 2

Archeanassa: member of the Archeanactid family of Lesbos

Archilochos: iambic and elegiac poet who lived on the islands of Paros and Thasos in the seventh century B.C.

West, ed., *Iambi et Elegi Graeci*

Aristophanes: comic poet of the fifth century B.C.

Aristotle: philosopher 384–322 B.C.

Artemis: goddess of animals, hunting, wild places and female freedom

Athenaios: writer of a miscellany of literary and other anecdotes called *Deipnosophistai*

Kaibel, ed.

Atthis: possibly a companion of Sappho, see fr. 8 and note

Atreus: father of Agamemnon and Menelaos

Catullus: lyric poet in Rome 84–54 B.C.

Chrysippos: Stoic philosopher 280–207 B.C.

von Arnim, ed., *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*

Comes Natalis: mythographer of the sixteenth century A.D.

Francofen, ed., *Mythologia*

Demetrios: literary critic who lived in the first century B.C. or A.D.

Rhys Roberts, ed., *De Elocutione*

Diehl: E. Diehl, *Anthologia Lyrica Graeca*, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1923 and 1936)

Diels: H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, griechisch und deutsch*, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1959–1960)

Dika: possibly a companion of Sappho, see fr. 81

Diogenian: lexicographer and paroemiographer of the second century A.D.
Leutsch-Schneidewin, eds., *Paroemiographi Graeci*, vol. 1

Dionysios of Halikarnassos: historian and grammarian of the first century B.C.
Usener-Radermacher, eds., *Opuscula*

Doricha: possibly a girlfriend of Sappho's brother, see frs. 7, 15 and notes

Eirana: possibly a companion of Sappho, see frs. 91 and 135

Eros: god of everything erotic

Etymologicum Genuinum: etymological dictionary compiled about 870 A.D. under Photios

Euboulos: comic poet of the early fourth century B.C.
Kock, ed., *Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta*, vol. 2

Euripides: Athenian tragic poet 485–406 B.C.

Eustathios: Christian grammarian of the twelfth century A.D. who wrote commentaries on Homer

Galen: writer on medicine, philosophy and grammar who (possibly) lived in the second century A.D.
Marquardt, ed., *Galen Scripta Minora*
Hilgard, ed., *Grammatici Graeci*, vol. 4

Gello: name of a girl who died untimely young; her ghost haunts little children

Georgios Choiroboskos: ninth-century-A.D. grammarian, deacon and ecclesiastical archivist of Constantinople

Hilgard, ed., *Scholia in Theodosii Canones*

Geraistion: temple of Poseidon at Geraistos in Euboea

Gongyla: possibly a companion of Sappho, see fr. 22 with note and fr. 95

Gorgo: possibly a companion of Sappho, see frr. 8, 22, 29c, 144, 155 and notes

Gow-Page: A. S. F. Gow and D. L. Page, eds., *The Greek Anthology*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1965)

Graces: goddesses who confer grace, beauty, charm, brightness

Gregory of Corinth: grammarian of the twelfth century A.D.

Walz, ed., *Rhetorici Graeci*, vol. 7

Gyrinno or Gyrinna: possibly a companion of Sappho, see fr. 82a and fr. 8 note

Hades: realm of the dead

Hekebolios: a sophist who taught rhetoric to Julian at Constantinople and changed his religion three times to keep up with imperial whim

Hektor: prince of Troy and husband of Andromache

Helen: wife of Menelaos and lover of Paris of Troy

Hera: wife of Zeus

Herodian: grammarian of the late second century A.D. and son of Apollonios Dyskolos

Lentz, ed., *Grammatici Graeci*, vol. 3

Herodotos: historian of the fifth century B.C.

Hermione: daughter of Helen and Menelaos

Himerios: rhetorician of the fourth century A.D.
Colonna, ed., *Orationes*

Hymenaios: god of weddings

Idaios: herald of Troy

Ilios: Greek name for Troy

Ilos: father of Priam, king of Troy

Julian: nephew of Constantine the Great and Roman emperor 361–363 A.D., notorious for his attempt to restore the pagan gods to primacy and for his long letters
Bidez-Cumont, eds., *Epistolae*

Kallimachos: poet, scholar, royal librarian of the great library at Alexandria under Ptolemy Philadelphos, lived 305–240 B.C. and is said by the *Suda* to have written eight hundred volumes of prose and verse

Kalliope: first of the nine Muses, whose name means “beautiful-voiced”

Kleanakdtidai: one of the ruling clans of the city of Mytilene in Sappho’s lifetime

Kleis: alleged name of Sappho’s mother and also of her daughter

Koos: father of Leto

Krete: Crete

Kronos: father of Zeus

Kypris: name of Aphrodite as one worshipped on the island of Kypros (Cyprus)

Kyprogeneia: epithet of Aphrodite (“Kypros-born”)

Kypros: Cyprus

Kythereia: name of Aphrodite as one associated with the city of Kythera in Krete

Leto: mother of Apollo and Artemis

Libanius: rhetorician, 314–393 A.D.

Förster, ed., *Orationes*

Longinus: literary critic of the first century A.D. whose authorship of *On the Sublime* is now disputed

Roberts, ed., *De Sublimitate*

LP: Lobel, E., and D. L. Page, eds., *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta* (Oxford, 1955)

Lydia: kingdom of western Asia Minor legendary for luxury

Marius Plotius Sacerdos: metrician and grammarian of the third century A.D.

Keil, ed., *Grammatici Latini*, vol. 6

Marsyas (the younger): historian of (probably) the first century A.D.

Maximus of Tyre: rhetorician and itinerant lecturer of the second century A.D.

Hobein, ed., *Orationes*

Medeia: princess of Kolchis and wife of Jason

Megara: possibly a companion of Sappho, see fr. 68a and fr. 8 note

Menander: comic poet 342–293 B.C.

Kock, ed., *Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta*, vol. 3

Mika: possibly a companion of Sappho, see fr. 71

Mnasadika: see fr. 82

Muses: goddesses of music, song, dance, poetry and erudition who were numbered at nine but Sappho is sometimes called the tenth (e.g., *Palatine Anthology* 7.14 and 9.506)

Mytilene: chief city of the island of Lesbos and home of Sappho

Nereids: nymphs of the sea, all fifty of them supposedly daughters of Nereus

Niobe: Theban woman killed by Artemis and Apollo after she boasted to Leto of the number of her children

Olympos: mountain where dwell the Olympian gods

Orion: lexicographer of the fifth century A.D.
Sturz, ed.

Palaiphatos: mythographer of the fourth century B.C.
Festa, ed., *Mythographi Graeci*, vol. 3

Palatine Anthology: collection of epigrams by various Greek poets compiled about 980 A.D. from earlier collections
Gow-Page, ed., *The Greek Anthology*

Pan: god of flocks and herds and outdoor amusements usually depicted as a man with goat's feet, horns and shaggy hair

Pandion: king of Athens and father of Prokne and Philomela; the former was the wife of Tereus; the latter was raped by Tereus, who cut out her tongue so she could not tell

Panormos: city of (possibly) Sicily

Paon: epithet of Apollo

Paphos: city of Kypros near which Aphrodite originally emerged from the sea

Parian Marble: marble column inscribed with important events of Greek history to 263 B.C. and from which certain information about the lives of ancient poets has been derived

Penthelids: one of the clans struggling for power in Mytilene in the seventh century B.C. and who claimed descent from Penthilos, son of Orestes

Pherekydes: pre-Socratic philosopher of the sixth century B.C.

Diels, ed., *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, griechisch und deutsch*, vol. 2

Phoibos: adjective meaning “pure bright radiant beaming,” used as epithet of Apollo

Phokaia: city of western Asia Minor

Photios: lexicographer and patriarch of Constantinople in the ninth century A.D.

Reitzenstein, ed., *Lexicon*

Pieria: region of northern Greece where the Muses live

Plakia: river near the city of Thebe

Pleiades: group of seven stars

Pliny (the elder): Roman encyclopaedist 23–79 A.D.

Pollux: lexicographer and rhetorician of the second century A.D.

Bethe, ed.

Polyanaktides: son of Polyanax and member of the Polyanaktid family of Lesbos

Posidippos: Greek poet of the third century B.C.

Gow-Page, ed., *The Greek Anthology*

Priam: king of Troy

Sapphic stanza: stanzaic form invented by Sappho that is composed of three hendecasyllabic (eleven-syllable) verses followed by one adonean (five-syllable) verse

Seneca: Roman philosopher and poet 4 B.C.–65 A.D.

Stobaios: anthologist of the early fifth century A.D.
Wachsmuth-Hense, eds.

Strabo: geographer of the first century A.D.
Kramer, ed.

Suda: lexicon compiled in Byzantium in the tenth century A.D.
Adler, ed.

Terentianus Maurus: grammarian and metrician of the late second century A.D.
Keil, ed., *Grammatici Latini*, vol. 6

Thebe: city of Asia Minor where Andromache lived before she married Hektor

Thyone: mortal woman also known as Semele who bore Dionysos to Zeus

Tryphon: grammarian of the first century B.C.
Spengel, ed., *Rhetores Graeci*, vol. 3

Tyndarids: descendants of Tyndareus, king of Sparta, who fathered Helen, Klytemnestra, Kastor, Pollux

Zeus: king of gods and father of (among others) Aphrodite