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SAPPHO OF LESBOS: INFLUENCES
IN ENGLISH LITERATURE AND
ART

by

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Sappho of Lesbos: Influence in Literature and Art

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This thesis has been accepted on behalf of the Department of English by their supervisory committee:

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Dr. Charles W. MacQuarrie

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Carol Dell'Amico", written above a horizontal line.

Dr. Carol Dell'Amico

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DEDICATION

For Summer, Georgie, and Sade



Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION TO SAPPHO:

As noted in the most recent *Norton Anthology of World Literature*, the standard view of the ancient Greek world is Homeric, *Iliad* centered, and about: “the battlefield where men fight and die” (636). Sappho was an Ancient Greek poet from the island of Lesbos whose floruit was in the early 6th century BCE. Although perhaps the most renowned lyric poet of the Western tradition, her work has remained current for over 2,000 years, she is ironically and oxymoronically, famously obscure. For example, a search of the recommended literature list for California Public schools (<http://www3.cde.ca.gov/reclitlist/search.aspx>) gives manifold results for Homer – both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are recommended – however, Sappho is not listed or recommended at all.

Sappho’s influence is vast and yet largely invisible. Who doesn’t appreciate that love is “bittersweet,” but so few people know that this is Sappho’s construction. I recently polled an upper division literature course and not one of the undergraduate students had ever heard of Sappho. This is especially unbalanced in light of her influence on other poets both Ancient and modern. A search of the University of Toronto’s database *Representative Poetry Online*, under the keyword “Sappho” turns up 20 major English and American poets who have directly used or referred to Sappho in their own work, including Alexander Pope, Robert Browning, and T.S. Eliot, but the database does not include other important poets who have

been notably influence by Sappho, such as Hilda Doolittle (H.D.) and Anne Carson (<http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/search/content/sappho>).

The purpose of this thesis is two-fold – on the one hand translation and on the other analysis of Sappho’s influences and depictions in English art and literature. I will include own translations of selected fragments of Sappho of Lesbos taking into consideration previous translations, and including philological notes and explanations of my translation choices. In subsequent chapters, I will explore the influence of Sappho and her transmission into English literature from the Romantic to the Modern period. Chapter one will include my translations and illustrations of selected fragments from Sappho, chapter two will focus on the significance of the myth of Aphrodite and Adonis to her work, chapter three on the influence of Sappho on Edgar Allan Poe, chapter four is concerned with the relevance of Sappho’s aesthetic ideal to the works of Oscar Wilde, and chapter five will deal with Sappho’s influence on the post-colonial writer Derek Walcott, focusing on his epic/Sapphic poem *Omeros*.

Chapter 1 Introduction and Review of Literature

Chapter 2 Sappho’s Aphrodite

Chapter 3 Sappho and Edgar Allan Poe’s “Al Araaf”

Chapter 4 Sappho, Aesthetics, Aestheticisms, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Chapter 5 Sappho and Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*

Chapter 6 Conclusions

There are many Ancient Greek editions of Sappho as well as English editions and translations from the Renaissance to the present, but the most useful edition is the Loeb parallel text edition of Sappho's fragments. This thesis will include fresh translations from Ancient Greek along with commentary and notes referring to older translations, including translations of recently discovered fragments of Sappho's poetry, and this thesis will extend the work of previous scholars, such as Margaret Reynolds and Mary Beard who have discussed Sappho's influence in authors such as H.D. and Anne Carson.

One goal of this thesis, then, will be a translation and analysis of selected fragments of Sappho's poetry. This work is intended both to allow me to understand and appreciate the poetry in the original language and to serve as publishable translations in their own right. This first-hand knowledge of Sappho's poetry in Ancient Greek will allow me enhanced scholarly depth and authority to better research the nature and extent of her influence. A second goal is to trace the influence of Sappho on British and American authors, and her poetic influence on Edgar Allan Poe's first, longest, and least discussed poem "Al Arraf," as well as on Wilde, Walcott, and other selected 20th century and post-colonial writers.

The classical world is usually introduced via a patriarchal perspective. Homer and Hesiod are the central texts, and the lives of the gods and aristocratic male heroes are emphasized. Sappho gives us an alternative lens through which to

introduce and explore the Ancient Greek world from a feminine perspective. The aesthetic and emotional focus of Sappho's work gives a unique and important perspective in Western literature. Sappho is the first female writer in the Western tradition whose works have survived. She is a touchstone of poetic excellence and the power of the feminine aesthetic from the classical era to the present, but her work and significance need to be reintroduced and reemphasized to contemporary readers. The translations in this thesis are intended to give me first-hand knowledge of the primary texts in the original and to make her poetry more accessible. The focus on Sappho's influence and importance in British and American literature, beginning with Poe's "Al Araaf," is meant to correct a curious scholarly lacuna.

This project seeks to emphasize the aesthetic elements of Ancient Greek culture, which are often obscured by the masculine hero ethos of the Homeric poems. I also hope to make especially accurate and accessible translations. For example, fragment 52 is the first Sappho poem I have translated.

There are two transliterations of the fragment: 1. ψαύην δ' οὐ δοκίμωμ' ὀράνω
†δυσπαχέα† and 2. Πσαύην δ' οὐ δοκίμοιμ' ὀράνω δύσι πάχεσιν

The usual translation of this fragment is "With my two arms, I do not aspire to touch the sky", but †δυσπαχέα† which by some editors transliterated is as δύσι πάχεσιν is a "hapax legonemon" – it appears only one time in the entire corpus of Ancient Greek literature. No one actually knows what it means.†δυσπαχέα†. This word is a compound of Δυσ "two" and either Παχέα/παχος "thick" or Παχυνο "to swell" or perhaps Πινξος "wrist or elbow." I even wonder if the word δύρον "a gift, present...the palm," but I think in the

end the element is much more likely to be δύσ than δύρ. We can also read δύσι πάχεσιν as Δύσι “two” compounded with Πάχυνω “to fatten, to make dull or gross of understanding” Numb.

In the end we should probably translate this passage keeping in mind that there are “two” of something -- arms, hands, limbs. It isn’t clear. Something, we assume that can palpate. The frequent mention of limbs in Sappho’s other poetry, and her emphasis on touch suggests “hands” is appropriate here, but what is important to Sappho is the poem is that she cannot touch, or hold. It could be “feelers,” but that seems oddly alien; while “the arm from the elbow to the finger tips” seems overly clinical. Perhaps “Connectors”? “Constellations”? or even in a humble reference to her old heavy hands “”thicknesses.” It makes me think of the lyrics “my hand felt like two balloons” from Pink Floyd’s song “Comfortably Numb.” Perhaps, Sappho, like Roger Waters is painting a mood with simple and child-like verbal imagery, and it is this play as well as deep emotion I seek to convey in my translations.

Sappho’s poems were written nearly two hundred years after Homer’s epics, and they can be seen as a female centered, aesthetic response to the macho, patriarchal, and even phallogocentric world of Homer (Norton 636). Sappho’s poems are concerned with feelings, and feminine beauty rather than masculine conflict and aggression. Her poems sunlight, moonlight, colors, as well as the goddess Aphrodite, who is associated with erotic longing and feminine beauty.¹

¹ A “Sapphic” poem is either a poem inspired by Sappho’s imagery or the most typical meter of her longer poems. According to Henry Thornton Wharton in his *Life*

While Sappho was one of the most famous and important poets of the classical world, she is called the “tenth muse” by Plato, and at one time there were many volumes of her work available. Sappho’s work was collected in 9 volumes in the library at Alexandria, which was burned some time during the late classical period, perhaps burned both in 47 B.C. and again in A.D. 642 (Staikos 80). And Sappho’s works were also, no doubt, burned en mass as part of the book burnings by Christian zealots in A.D. 380 and A.D. 1072.

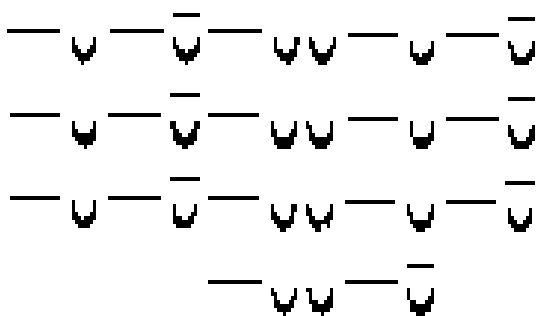
Translating Sappho is rarely easy. For example, here are two transliterations of fragment 52:

1. ψαύην δ' οὐ δοκίμωμ' ὀράνω †δυσπαχέα†

and

2. Πσαύην δ' οὐ δοκίμοιμ' ὀράνω δύσι πάχεσιν

of Sappho: “The metre commonly called after her name was probably not invented by her; it was only called Sapphic because of her frequent use of it. Its strophe is made up thus:”



It is difficult for a translator to get all of these meanings into a single word in translation. Is there a word which will suggest that she is looking out at stars that look within reach, though they are light-years away and perhaps even long dead? Sappho's freshness and immediacy in some ways seems to reflect the childhood of the western world, when ideas and words are fresh, new, simple and direct.

This simple directness, and fresh immediacy are central to Sappho's influence on Edgar Allan Poe, and his concern with perfect beauty, especially the image of the lovely dead woman speaking to us beyond the grave. Sappho is a resonant source and parallel in all of Poe's work, especially in regard to the notion of the binaries death/beauty, dark/eternity, joy/despair, as well as the figure of the revenant woman who being not quite dead speaks to us from beyond the grave either internally within our own minds or actually in a phantasmagorical reality which allows for a space in between life and death and in between heaven or hell and worldly existence.

The influence of Sappho on late 19th century authors such as Oscar Wilde is manifest, but under appreciated. This is especially clear in Wilde's "aestheticism" which is often associated with his mentor Walter Pater and owes its roots to the Ancient Greek tradition, especially to the presentation of beauty for its own sake in Sappho. Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, with its love of paradox, and the conflict and potential resolution of inner and outer beauty is especially "Sapphic". Sappho's influence on the American poet H.D. is also apparent in the title of one of her works, *The Wise Sappho*, and in her attempt to recreate a Sapphic voice and aesthetic in modern prosody. Another important 20th century American writer, J.D. Salinger, is also clearly influenced by Sappho, most obviously in his novella *Raise High the Roof-Beams Carpenters*, which is actually a line

from one of Sappho's fragments, but more interestingly in the supernal beauty of a voice and a presence speaking to us from beyond the grave, which extends that aspect of Sappho most cherished by Poe, and yet is transgendered in Salinger with Seymore Glass representing a Sapphic perfection speaking to us vicariously from beyond the grave, and of Salinger himself, whose later novels were kept hermetically sealed, and will only begin to be released to the reading audience beginning this year. Critics suspect that we will again hear from the beautiful but dead Seymore via the prose of the beautiful but dead Salinger. It is a fairly compelling and rather creepy aesthetic which extends and perhaps perverts Sappho in some respects.

Sappho is also an important influence in Derek Walcott's *Omeros* on the thematic, aesthetic, and prosodic levels. The resonance of the Sapphic oxymoron, and the *adonaic* line, as well as Walcott's emphasis on the beauty of the feminine and of nature, suggest a reading of *Omeros* as a post-colonial work which juxtaposes and seeks to reconcile the masculine, colonialist, and Homeric perspective with a post-colonial, feminine, and Sapphic one. This dichotomy reflects a larger conflict and confluence between European/African/Caribbean cultures and literatures which is central to the thematic of the poem. In the end though, what is most remarkable, is the excellent poetry which results from Walcott's expansive and inclusive aesthetic.

Chapter 2

SAPPHO'S APRHODITE

Aphrodite's importance in Sappho's poetry is manifest and manifold; perhaps the most important myth associated with Aphrodite in Sappho's work is the myth of Aphrodite and Adonis which is most fully articulated in fragment one, but is also suggested elsewhere as in fragment 96. Adonis is referred to directly in only three of the Sappho fragment (96, 140, and 168), while Aphrodite appears by name in many of Sappho's poems – in fact, Aphrodite and her epithets, are the most frequently used personal name in Sappho's corpus. Her importance to Sappho cannot be overstated, and the nature of Sappho's use of Aphrodite is especially interesting and worthy of exploration. Sappho's poetry is about love, especially the suffering of love, and Sappho's Aphrodite is an Aphrodite who suffers, and who is therefore presented as an empathetic and compassionate mediator.

The myth of Aphrodite and Adonis, though fragmentary in Sappho, is found in a fairly complete form in Bion's poem "Lament for Adonis." Although Bion postdates Sappho by some 500 years, his version is no doubt based on a much older version of the story, and the myth itself clearly predates Sappho. Bion's version is more complete than the oldest fragment that we get from Sappho, but both versions refer to a much older traditional story.²

² In the Lobe Edition, *Greek Lyric One: Sappho and Alcaeus*. Edited and translated by David A. Campbell, Campbell notes that, "this is the earliest mention of the Adonis cult, which reached Asia Minor from Syria via Cyprus." (Pg. 155). Campbell also notes that the metrical line used by Sappho here is the Adonic lines

Bion's version of the myth focuses on the ending, and begins after Aphrodite has already fallen in love with Adonis and has just learned about his death. He describes an Aphrodite who has lost her "Sacred appearance..." and "...her chest was made scarlet by her hands...snowy before grew crimson for Adonis." Aphrodite calls to Adonis to catch up with him and kiss him one last time, "And I shall keep that kiss as if it were Adonis himself" (). Because of her love for Adonis, and due to this "kiss" specifically, Aphrodite seems to be humanized. Her suffering makes her more like humans, more empathetic to them (both in that she can feel for humans and humans can feel for her). She is made more accessible by her love, suffering, and loss. She mourns his death, and regrets his passing, and yet despite his death Adonis remains beautiful and potentially reincarnated both in nature and in ritual. Adonis's blood gives birth to the rose, and Aphrodite's tears give birth to the anemone. Death and sorrow lead to beauty and rebirth in nature. She drapes him with flowers and, according to this version of the myth, since his death all flowers must wilt.

The fates call on Adonis; Aphrodite must wait to weep another year and revivify Adonis in nature. The mention of Persephone here also suggests that Adonis's rebirth is associated with spring. Persephone plays a role similar to the role Hades plays in the Persephone myth, but reverses the genders. Here Persephone wants to keep Adonis much as Hades wants to keep her. In a different version of the myth, most completely detailed by Ovid in book ten of his *Metamorphoses*, rather than falling in romantic love with a sexualized and erotically attractive Adonis, both Aphrodite and Persephone fall in maternal love with the beauty of a baby, but in both cases it seems as though Aphrodite loses some of her beauty and "sacred appearance" because of her suffering, and also

perhaps because she has sacrificed some of her power so that Adonis can be reborn and return to her.

Sappho's allusion to the story is much more fragmentary than Bion's, yet she expresses the quintessence of the myth: "'Delicate Adonis is dying, Cytherea; What are we to do?' 'Beat your breast girls, and tear your clothes.'" (Campbell 155)". For Sappho it is about love and loss, but also growth and compassion. It is the key story to appreciating Aphrodite in Sappho as a figure analogous in some ways to mother Mary in catholic ritual as the intercessor. What is not always clear, however, is which god Aphrodite is interceding with. It is even possible to see Aphrodite as being an anthropomorphized and feminized eros – perhaps Aphrodite intercedes with Eros, the old elemental and pre-Titanic Eros described in Hesiod's Theogony.

Sappho's conception of love, ερως, is focused on Aphrodite. For Sappho Aphrodite is Eros a feminine version of the catalyst that inspires life related to but different from the version expressed in Hesiod and in Homer. For Sappho Aphrodite is accessible because of her suffering-- she has been humanized by her love for Adonis. Aphrodite's suffering has allowed her to be an empathetic mediator. Unlike Athena or Hera who are strong, physically powerful and seemingly invulnerable, Aphrodite is vulnerable and suffers both physically and emotionally.

Aphrodite's physical vulnerability is most clearly expressed in Homer's *Iliad* book 5, when Diomedes, having been encouraged to do so by Athena, attacks and wounds Aphrodite who is attempting to protect her son Aeneas from harm. Diomedes cuts her and she bleeds. Although, she clearly does not belong on a battle field she is

there because of love. She puts herself in harm's way and suffers a wound because of her maternal love. Aphrodite also suffers in the well-known passage from Homer's *Odyssey* book 3 when her husband traps her in bed with Ares by means of a cunningly wrought golden net. She suffers the physical discomfort of being bound uncomfortably close to Ares and she suffers the emotional distress of having been discovered as an adulteress, in a very public manner by the gods who laugh at her and Ares. She flees as soon as possible to her sanctuary on Kythera to recover her well-being and her dignity. In a related way Aphrodite suffers in that she has been forced to marry Hephaestus the least attractive of the gods. Her beauty, as Helen's, is related to her suffering. Both Hera and Athena resent Aphrodite for her beauty and erotic power and they sometimes seek to punish her for it. While at other times as when Hera begs her to help seduce Zeus, they also respect and admire her. Aphrodite of course is not always a victim. She is a powerful goddess in relation to Helen. She can be oppressive; for example, she forces Helen to sleep with a Paris who has fled from battle with a much more manly and warlike Menelaus. In fact, Helen being compelled to sleep with Paris is similar to Aphrodite being forced by Zeus to marry Hephaestus.

This notion of Aphrodite as an oppressor, however, does not seem to be part of Sappho's conception of the goddess. Sappho addresses Aphrodite in ways that are both pleading and familiar and at other times Sappho is more formal in her invocation of Aphrodite, but even her familiarity is never disrespectful. It is more like a companionship, a friendship, and they share an understanding of wanting love – both feel deeply about love and the loss of love.

In Sappho's fragment one, "The Hymn to Aphrodite," we hear Aphrodite's rather petulant response to Sappho's request, "What was the matter with me this time and why was I calling this time and what in my maddened heart I most wished to happen for myself:.." (Campbell 55). Aphrodite replies to Sappho. "Whom am I to persuade this time to lead you back to her love..." This is not Sappho's first request of Aphrodite in fact Aphrodite has delivered her from love before: "Come to me now and again deliver me from oppressive anxieties..." (Campbell 55). Aphrodite is accustomed to these requests by Sappho, and Sappho realizes that she might even be somewhat impatient with her, as a mother might be impatient with a spoiled and insistent child. The "what do you want this time" is parallel with Helen's questioning of what more Aphrodite wants of her in Book 3 of the *Iliad* where Aphrodite actually threatens to make both Greeks and Trojans hate Helen if she does not do as Aphrodite wants. But rather than emphasize the contrast and conflict between her and Aphrodite, later in the hymn Sappho calls Aphrodite her fellow fighter, *συμμαχο*. Aphrodite also understands the pain of love for and as we know from other fragments, the root of Aphrodite's sympathy is her own suffering for Adonis. The cult of Aphrodite suggested in Sappho's hymn and in other fragments seems to be a cult focused on love, suffering and sympathy. Sappho's Aphrodite is eminently approachable.

In almost all the appearances in Sappho Aphrodite is called on as companion of Sappho. In Sappho's fragment two, Sappho invites, Cypris, to come to her and invites her to join them in their festivities. The blossoms with spring flowers suggests perhaps an allusion to Adonis and his reincarnation as a flower. The fragment refers to roses and flowers of spring that relate to Bion's Lament for Adonis, "with you has died my

Kestos.” Another translation of this line in Lament to Adonis is “With you has the girdle of my beauty perished.” It is almost as though in Fragment 2, Sappho is inviting Aphrodite to come down and join the festivities of spring; it is then when roses and flowers bloom and Aphrodite may take solace in her grief for Adonis: “Cypris, take... and pour gracefully into golden cups nectar that is mingled with our festivities” (Campbell 57).

Sappho’s idea of eros is different from the way it is presented in epic. In her lyrical depiction we can see not merely sex but also a soft love, maternal love, friendship, as well as sexual passion. For example, in fragment 47 from the Loeb edition, “Love shook my heart like wind falling on oaks on a mountain.” Love here of course in Greek is, *Eros*, and may be read as the god as well as the emotion. The poem conveys Love’s effect on Sappho, but we don’t have to read the love as necessarily violent or overwhelming depending on how we translate words such as *ανεμος* and *δριναξε*.

One interesting aspect of the Loeb edition is that it includes a translation from Maximus of Tyre in which he connects the *eros* in this fragment with the *Eros* discussed in Plato’s *Phaedrus*:

Socrates says Eros is a sophist, Sappho calls him a weaver of tales.

Socrates is driven mad for Phaedrus by Eros, while Sappho’s heart is

Shaken by Eros like wind falling on oaks on a mountain; (Campbell 83)

This connection between the *eros* in Sappho and that in *The Phaedrus* is both interesting and problematic. In fact, Maximus’s interpretation that Socrates is love mad

for Phaedrus is eccentric. In *The Phaedrus*, Socrates exhibits control and rationality in his discussions with Phaedrus, and is only arguably “mad” in his seemingly divinely inspired disquisition on the growing of wings due to exposure to the beauty in the world of forms. Maximus seems also to get Sappho wrong here, in that the image of love being like wind in the oak trees is a gentle one. She doesn’t describe a tornado, a hurricane, or even stormy winds, but rather *ανεμος*, just winds, and the only suggestion of turmoil is the verb “falling” in reference to the wind and *ετιναξε* “shook” which refers to her heart, but *ετιναξε* can also be translated as “stirred” which suggests a more gentle and welcome emotion.

This comment interestingly ties in with Sappho’s fragment 16, where Sappho suggests a clear distinction between her idea of Eros/eros and that of Homer and Hesiod, the catalyst force of nature who causes procreation, war, and conflict: “Some say a host of cavalry, others of infantry and others of ships, is the most beautiful thing on the black earth, but I say it is whatsoever a person loves.”³

Aphrodite is central to Sappho’s poetic corpus, and she is key to understanding both Sappho’s notion of love and beauty, as well as the possible ritualistic and ceremonial references in the poetry. The myth of Aphrodite and Adonis is especially important, and the notion of the suffering and ensuing compassion of Aphrodite who has loved and lost, is recurring and aesthetically crucial. The humanizing of Aphrodite in the myth of Adonis and in Sappho’s lyric can be seen in curious juxtaposition to the semi-

³I hope in a connected paper to explore possible parallels between Sappho’s humanized lyric aesthetic and the contemporary transition in Greek sculpture from the more rigid and formal statues of the Archaic period to the softer and more human sculpture of the classical period. Is the move from epic to lyric as seen in Sappho something that was part of a zeitgeist in the Greek world of her time?

deification of Sappho as the tenth muse. Aphrodite sacrifices and suffers for love and hence becomes more human, while Sappho's suffering and expression make her almost divine and immortal.



Chapter 3

“AL ARAAF” AND THE POE/SAPPHO CONNECTION

Although the connection between the two poets may not be obvious to all readers, the emphasis, almost obsession, with beauty and aesthetics is evident in both Edgar Allan Poe and Sappho of Lesbos. Poe’s morbid aesthetic of the death (and sometimes revivification of a beautiful young woman or a girl) is prefigured in his first reference to Sappho. This reference, as well as a footnote by Poe himself, identifying the character as Sappho, occurs in his longest and one of his earliest poems, “Al Aaraaf,” which alludes to the myth that Sappho killed herself for love by jumping off a cliff. But Poe’s poetry is influenced by Sappho both at a stylistic and aesthetic level.¹ Sappho’s influence on Poe is manifest in two ways. First, in his ideal of the woman who dies for love, and yet whose poetic voice speaks after death, and in the very aesthetic of supernal beauty which Poe adapts stylistically in his poetry. Beginning with the stylistic presentation of beauty and the allusion to Sappho in “Al Aaraaf” and ending with the revenant female beauty in “Annabel Lee,” this chapter will track the initial conception of Sapphic beauty adopted and adapted by Poe, and then explore some of its developments in his later work. While it might have begun as classical and Sappho-inspired, changes, perhaps because of the vicissitudes of his own life, resulted in Poe’s aesthetic becoming increasingly focused on a dark supernal beauty and the other eternal.

Critics have considered “Al Aaraaf” to be “notoriously obscure” from the beginning, though some have argued that within the poem is an expression of Poe’s argument that “supernal loveliness” beyond mere reason can help us to come to an understanding of truth, and that the poem is a prefiguration of Poe’s theory of poetry expressed later in his essay “Poetic Principles” (Stovall “An Interpretation,” 125, 133), because of Poe’s footnote, have understood that Sappho was significant in “Al Aaraaf,” but Yopie Prins, in her *Victorian Sappho*, makes the case that the influence of Sappho is important, centrally important, in much of Poe’s other work as well:

The death of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetic topic in the world,” Poe writes in “The Philosophy of Composition,” ironically transforming an organic model of poetry into a form of mechanical repetition (1965: 3,211). Indeed, in so far as the tradition of lyric poetry is predicated on the death of Sappho in particular, it would seem that Sappho is the very embodiment of Poe’s proposition: her death has become a recurring topos among Poe’s contemporaries and especially among the women poets of the day, who call upon Sappho to authorize a voice that proclaims itself dead, again and again. While Poe’s response to that rhetorical predicament is parody... (Prins 49)

The smoking gun, however, that proves Edgar Allan Poe’s knowledge of Sappho of Lesbos occurs in “Al Aaraaf” which is perhaps Poe’s earliest and certainly his longest poem. In line 47 of the poem, page 15 of the original edition, the line “†Of her who lov’d a mortal — and so died —.” At the bottom of the page, Poe himself has footnoted the reference as simply “Sappho” (15). The extent and nature of Poe’s knowledge of Sappho

is not as easily surmised. Poe claimed that he had written the poem "Al Aaraaf" when he was fifteen years old, though he also apparently claimed that he had written it when he was fifteen and also when he was twelve (Silverman 55). It was published when in 1829.

The poem is long, Poe's longest at 422 lines. In the poem Poe conflates classical allusion with biblical allusion and wraps it all in a story he borrowed from Koran about...." But the poem was apparently inspired by Tycho Brahe's sighting of a supernova in 1572. Poe presents this exploding star as "Al Aaraaf" and locates it as a kind of purgatory or limbo between Hell and Paradise (curiously Poe refers to Milton but not Dante in this poem). In a letter to his publisher, Poe explained: "Its title is "Al Aaraaf" from the Al Aaraaf of the Arabians, a medium between Heaven and Hell where men suffer no punishment, but yet do not attain that tranquil & even happiness which they supposed to be the characteristics of heavenly enjoyment" (Stoval "An interpretation," 155).

Poe seems to connect the idea of death for the sake of love with another dimensional immortality which can reach both object of the dead lover's affection, and vice versa. It also seems that the oxymoronic immortal-death love, reaches audiences via the revenant voice, of either a lonely lover from the far side of the grave, or of the happy lovers reunited in death. Sappho, it seems, stands for the first of these. The suicide lover/poet whose voice comes back to us, evoking a beauty impossible from a living mortal poet. Sappho in this first reference to the beautiful dead woman whose voice manifests aesthetic perfection, prefigures the beautiful dead and undead women who inhabit the surface and the subterranean of Poe's subsequent fiction.

The ideal beauty he connects with the Greek world represented architecturally by the Parthenon and poetically by Sappho, though the Sappho that Poe presents seems to be as much the Sappho from Ovid's *Heroides*, a fictional version of the poetess who leaps off a cliff to her death because her young lover has left her. In his notes Poe quotes Milton, Goethe, Marlowe, Strabo, etc., and he refers to Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and while he quotes Milton in both English and Latin, he does not quote any lines from Sappho.

Perhaps echoing Sappho famous oxymoron "bitter/sweet love", Poe describes both error and death as "sweet," with the oblique oxymorons "Sweet/error" and "sweeter/death":

Seraphs in all but "Knowledge," the keen light
That fell, refracted, thro' thy bounds, afar
O! Death! from eye of God upon that star:
Sweet was that error — sweeter still that death —
Sweet was that error — ev'n with us the breath
Of science dims the mirror of our joy —
To them 'twere the Simoom, and would destroy —

The narrative of the poem at this point is leading towards the eternal limbo the two lovers who are the focus of the poem will fall into when they do not respond to the call of the archangel. Angelo, speaking to his lover Ianthe, describes his death on Earth and his flight to limbo on Al Aaraaf. At the end of the dialogue between the lovers it may be that Al Aaraaf goes supernova and explodes perhaps killing Angelo a second time, but most critics argue that because the lovers had not responded to the song of the messenger

angel Ligea, and remained on Aaraaf enjoying each other's company, the two loves will forever be banned from entering heaven. Their love will be immortal in an in between world where they shall be forever alone together.

The last spot of Earth's orb I trod upon
* Was a proud temple call'd the Parthenon —
More beauty clung around her column'd wall
†Than ev'n thy glowing bosom beats withal,
And when old Time my wing did disenthral
Thence sprang I — as the eagle from his tower,

Angelo, leaves the classical beauty of Athen's Parthenon which seems to represent the ideal of universal beauty. Poe is clearly classically centered here, even in a poem which uses the *Koran* as a thematic setting. There are repeated echoes from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the poem, especially in words such as "margin," "maid," "bee." And the poem is primarily composed in rhyming couplets, but the "songs" are in abab format:

In its dream of deep rest,
At the many star-isles
That enjewel its breast —
Where wild flowers, creeping,
Have mingled their shade,
On its margin is sleeping
Full many a maid —
Some have left the cool glade, and

* Have slept with the bee —
Arouse them my maiden,
On moorland and lea —
Go! breathe on their slumber,
All softly in ear,
The musical number
Dim was its little disk, and angel eyes
Alone could see the phantom in the skies,

Al Aaraaf itself, the supernova discovered by Tycho Brahe, is personified as a woman “her,” and the beauty of the trembling star, which is soon to explode, is one which conflates brightness of star light, the dark of deep space, though some of the imagery such as “glowing Beauty’s bust” is difficult to construe. Poe capitalizes “Beauty” implying that it is a classical deity, Aphrodite perhaps, but it also seems to refer back to the antecedent “Al Aaraaf,” as if the star itself represents both classical beauty as well as cataclysmic destruction.

When first Al Aaraaf knew her course to be
Headlong thitherward o’er the starry sea —
But when its glory swell’d upon the sky,
As glowing Beauty’s bust beneath man’s eye,
We paus’d before the heritage of men,
And thy star trembled — as doth Beauty then!”

But the nub of the plot is with the lovers themselves who have not responded to the summons, and so are consigned either to death or more likely to eternal limbo; they will never be allowed to enter heaven but will be trapped in an eternal purgatory which conflates both Christian and Muslim theology. This purgatory, however, does not seem to be a punishment from the perspective of the lovers. Angelo and Ianthe are together forever in a world in between life and death, and they seem to want it that way.

Thus, in discourse, the lovers whiled away

The night that waned and waned and brought no day

They fell: for Heaven to them no hope imparts

Who hear not for the beating of their hearts.

According to William B. Cairns, the passionate excitement of love is the cause of Angelo and Ianthe's downfall, but it is also through this transfer to the new dwelling of beauty that both Angelo and Ianthe can then pay tribute to the beauty of the world. Poe essentially tries to deliver a world that is not heaven nor earth where the enlightened human souls mediate between heaven and hell and conveying the awareness of beauty to the world. Angelo expresses his desire to return to earth, but Ianthe questions his desire saying that the brighter place for dwelling is where they are, where the grass is greener and women and passion are far lovelier.

Similarly to T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, Poe's 'Al Aaraaf' is also rather densely footnoted by the poet, and it is not only the text but also Poe's footnotes, and not only the one that mentions Sappho, that we get a better understanding of the message and mood Poe intends to convey in the poem. For example, in a footnote to page 27 he says: "‡ I have often thought I could distinctly hear the sound of the darkness as it stole over the

horizon.” Rather than an oxymoron “sound of the darkness” is a conundrum meant to show a blending of senses and emotions, similar to “bitter/sweet.” And on page 34 he includes this footnote: Sorrow is not excluded from “Al Aaraaf,” but it is that sorrow which the living love to cherish for the dead, and which, in some minds, resembles the delirium of opium. The passionate excitement of Love and the buoyancy of spirit attendant upon intoxication are its less holy pleasures — the price of which, to those souls who make choice of “Al Aaraaf” as their residence after life, is final death and annihilation.”

Poe’s idea of the transferring of beauty in the symbol of death is most certainly bodied forth in *Al Aaraaf*, and it is clear also that this beauty/death binary is located early on in Poe’s understanding of Sappho. It is not clear how much Sappho Poe had read. Later in life when he was a newspaper editor, he did edit at least one Sappho translation, but the Sappho that Poe mentions in his footnote to *Al Aaraaf* is connected with the later myth that she leaped to her death from a cliff because she was so distraught at having been left by a younger male lover. This story is most prominently found in Ovid’s *Heroides*, probably written somewhere between 25 and 16 B.C, though critics such as in Coleridge’s *Politian*.(Stovall “Poe’s Debt,” 76). In fact Poe had a classical education from childhood; Killis Campbell suggests that Poe would have “had the school drill in Greek and Roman history” (186), and according to Darlene Harbour Unrue:

at an early age he began the study of Latin, and before he entered the University of Virginia in 1827 he was accomplished in reading Horace and Cicero, scanning Latin poetry, capping verses, and composing satires in the neoclassical style...he became proficient in Greek...he is known to

have read widely in Plat, Homer, Lucian, and Aristotle, among other classical writers, and in Tasso. It is also important that Poe thought of himself as a Southerner, a member of a regional society that was internally classical in its structure of social hierarchy and externally and visibly so in its architectural milieu of porticoes and columned buildings, many of them modeled on famous classical structures such as the Parthenon (114)

There are then multiple sources from which Poe is likely to have been familiar with Sappho and her work from his school days. And as in other poems, such as *Pinkadia*, in which Poe gives a list of the works that influenced his poem, we can be sure that the influences were various (Jackson 260-1). But it is Ovid's *Heroides* that is most clearly the inspiration for the appearance of Sappho in *Al Aaraaf*. At the end of her "letter" as depicted by Ovid, after complaining about Phaon having made all other lovers, both female and male, unpalatable to her, Sappho opines:

Spread your sails: the sea-born Goddess will smooth the waves, and prosperous gales speed your course. Only weigh anchor, and set sail. Cupid himself, sitting at the helm, will govern the bark; he with a skilful hand will unfold and gather in the sails. Or do you choose to fly from unhappy Sappho? Alas! what have I done to be thus the object of your aversion? At least inform me of this by a few cruel lines, that I may plunge myself, with all my miseries, amidst the Leucadian waves.

This passage we can be fairly confident was one that Poe had read based on the content of the poem and the footnote that identifies Sappho as the tragic suicidal poetess. What is

less clear is how much of the actual poetry of Sappho Poe was familiar with. Poetic fragment 94, which describes a passionate love affair that has come to an end. Although Sappho's poems and fragments are written in ancient Greek and the translations vary, the idea of her poems still convey a strong and intense mood

Like Poe's "Al Aaraaf," *Fragment 94* of Sappho is a poem focused on the tragic and the beautiful as it relates to love. It is a work about a sad parting between two lovers and the efforts of one to comfort the other. Many lines are incomplete, and it is questionable whether the first surviving line is the original first line of the poem. In fact the Loeb edition of the poem in Ancient Greek begins with an ellipsis (116). This uncertainty, like the obscurity of "Al Aaraaf" enhances the fascination of the poem rather than detracting from it. It is the mood of both poems, the "sound of the darkness" the ineffable that concerns both poets. The beginning line of Sappho's fragment 94 reads ".....τεθνάκην ἀδόλως, θέλω·ά με ψισδομένα κατελίμπανεν...and honestly I wish I were dead" (117) it starts with sorrow and is strong as an introduction. Both the beginning and the end of the poem perhaps have the most persuasive line in the whole poem. In the poems last lines, "...you would satisfy your longing for tender..." These lines effectively summarizes "Al Aaraaf" as well, where the two lovers in a world of eternal darkness, between life and death, having only their mutual longing for each other to sustain them until the universe ends.

The critic who has made the most compelling case for the importance of Sappho in Poe's work is Yopie Prins who observes in her book *Victorian Sappho* that while he was editor at the *Broadway Journal*, Poe actually edited a translation of Sappho fragment 31 and included it in a number of the journal that also contained his short story "The

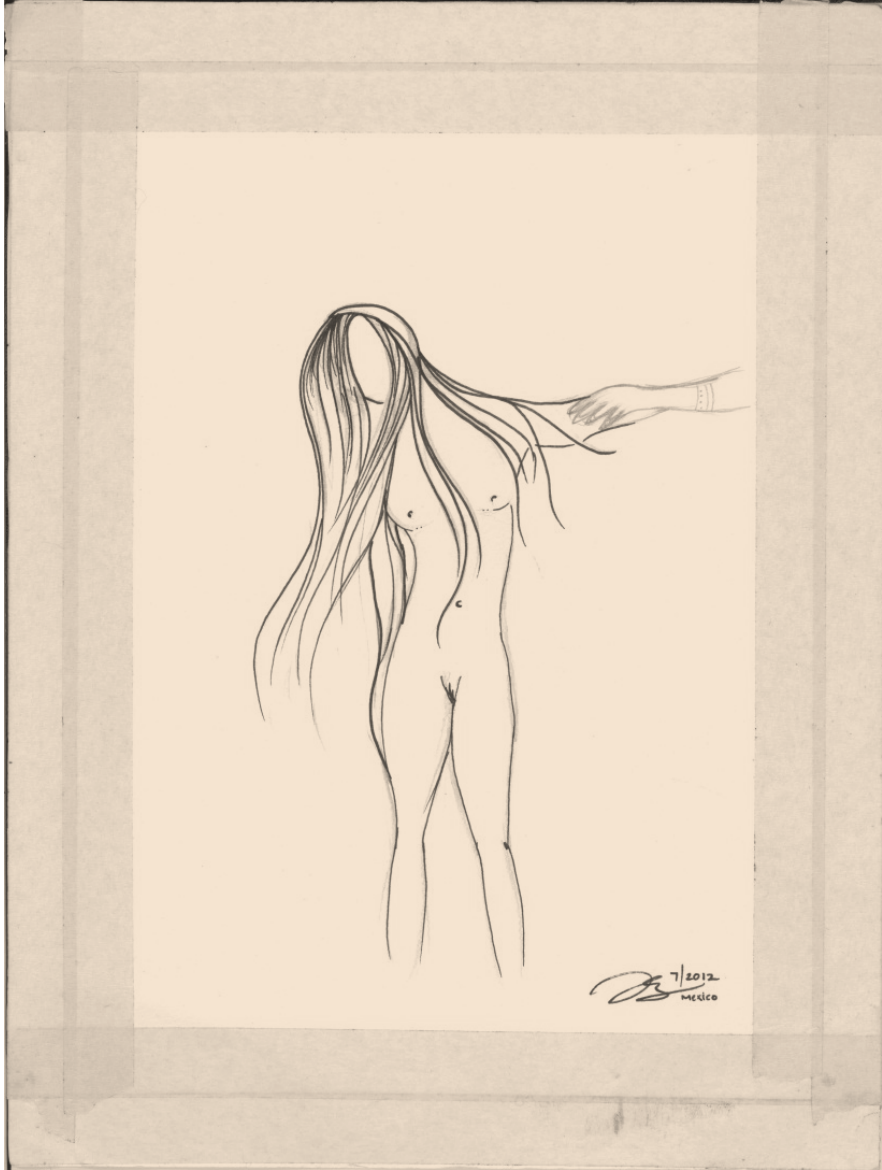
Premature Burial,” both works, as Prins notes, present the reader with a speaking corpse, and Poe’s story:

of living inhumation replays the sublime scenario of fragment 31, as he describes a man, “seemingly dead” who survived his own burial and who “in broken sentences spoke of his agonies in the grave. (Prins 48-9)

Prins also points to Poe’s reviews, including one published in 1841, in which Poe discusses the particular nature of the “poetry of women” which he characterizes as “tender” poetry which manifests the eloquence of “woman’s suffering and worth (226).

Poe’s final poem, “Annabel Lee” opens with winged seraphs, a sepulcher, envious angles, heaven and hell all of which are images that allude a wasting world. Poe shows a different mastery and shift in his language. The feeling he describes in “Annabel Lee” although similar to “Al Aaraaf” , provides a contrast to Poe’s views of poetry and the distinction between poetry and beauty. As, Cairns notes, “The term “beauty” does not occur. It was apparently not until thirteen years after the publication of “Al Aaraaf” that Poe put in definite form the theories associated with his name (44).” Poe’s presentation of beauty in Annabel Lee does not emphasis death over life rather the beauty of Annabel Lee is transcending beauty that death can’t bring to an end. Instead as a result of death her beauty evokes us, as it is with Poe’s first female illusion with Sappho’s suicide and the many other women in Poe’s writings. It can’t be doubted that Poe’s expression and ideas of supernal beauty and eternal had long been evolving from “Al Aaraaf”, from Sappho, to “Ligea” and “Annabel Lee”, these ideas are evident.

In fact, Sappho is a resonant source and parallel in all of Poe's work, especially in regard to the notion of the binaries death/beauty, dark/eternity, joy/despair, as well as the figure of the revenant woman who being not quite dead speaks to us from beyond the grave either internally within our own minds or actually in a phantasmagorical reality with allows for a space in between life and death and in between heaven or hell and worldly existence.



Chapter 4

SAPPHO, AESTHETICS, AESTHETICISM AND

OSCAR WILDE'S *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*

*But Sappho, who, in the antique world, was a pillar of flame, is to us but a pillar of shadow. Of her poems, burnt with other most precious work by Byzantine Emperor and by Roman Pope, only a few fragments remain. Possibly they lie mouldering in the scented darkness of an Egyptian tomb, clasped in the withered hands of some long-dead lover. Some Greek monk at Athos may even now be poring over an ancient manuscript, whose crabbed characters conceal lyrics or ode by her whom the Greeks spoke of as "the Poetess," just as they termed Homer "the Poet," who was to them the tenth Muse, the flower of the Graces, the child of Eros, and the pride of Hellas – Sappho with the sweet voice, the bright beautiful eyes, the dark hyacinth-coloured hair. But, practically, the work of the marvellous singer of Lesbos is entirely lost to us. We have a few rose leaves out of her garden, that is all. Literature nowadays survives marble and bronze, but in old days, in spite of the Roman poet's noble boast, it was not so. The fragile clay bases of the Greek's still keep for us pictures of Sappho, delicately painted in black and red and white, but of her song we have only the echo of an echo... Of all the women of history, Mrs. Browning is the only one that we could name in any possible or remote conjunction with Sappho. Sappho was undoubtedly a far more flawless and perfect artist. She stirred the whole antique world more than Mrs. Browning ever stirred our modern age. Never had Love such a singer. Even in the few lines that remain to us the passion seems to scorch and burn. But, as unjust Time, who has crowned her with the barren laurels of fame, has twined with them the dull poppies of oblivion, let us turn from the mere memory... (Wilde, *The Artist as Critic*, 102)*

As is clear from the above quotation, Oscar Wilde was keenly aware of Sappho of Lesbos and her poetic aesthetic. In fact, Wilde came to fame as an icon of the aesthetic movement which idealized Sappho and the Ancient Greek tradition. Even before studying with Walter Pater, the founding father of British Aestheticism, Wilde had embraced the

Aesthetic movement while an undergraduate at Trinity College, Dublin (Ellmann 75). Although much of the recent scholarship on Wilde has focused on his homosexuality, and in fact Wilde has become a kind of icon for the modern gay rights movement, there remains an important strand of scholarly interest in Wilde's aestheticism (Frankel, Gen. Intro. ¶ 2). In fact, like Sappho, the focus may be skewed in modern scholarship away from the aesthetics and towards sexuality. Some of the scholarship connects his aestheticism and his homosexuality, and credits/blames Walter Pater, and his particularly homoerotic and Sapphic aesthetic, as a formative influence for both. Much of the work on Wilde's aestheticism focuses on *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, has been described as the kind of artistic inspiration of the aesthetic movement (Riquelme 631).

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde, as Richard Ellmann details in his biography of Wilde, was the second son born to a prominent Dublin surgeon, William Wilde and his wife Jane, Lady Wilde (Ellmann 17). His rather eccentric upbringing under the direction of Lady Wilde, who claimed to have wanted a girl and to have dressed and treated Oscar as a girl until he was ten is un-provable, but it seems he was encouraged to be eccentric himself and to think and act outside of the box (Ellmann 15). Wilde's background may have influenced his aestheticism. His eccentric mother, and the duplicity which is central to the novel mirror elements from his own life. His father a famous and highly "respectable" Dublin surgeon had a second family that Oscar only learned about at his father's funeral. Ellmann's biography has nearly 200 references to aestheticism in the index (631). The early entries begin with Trinity College, Dublin where, Ellmann claims Wilde first became an aesthetic (27), and also includes his disavowal or 'art for art sake' (310, 318). Ellmann's chapter XII is titled "The Age of Dorian" and the first section of

that chapter is sub-headed “The New Aestheticism” (305). According to Ellmann people in the 1890’s learned from the novel about everything from pornography to how to “shape a sentence and live in style.” He claims that the *Picture of Dorian Gray* became the example of aestheticism for people to follow (305).

Wilde was certainly exposed to eccentricity via his mother, an arguably Sapphic figure in his life, and a hidden life via his father’s example, but it is impossible to say to what extent this shaped his aestheticism or his propensity to find aesthetic philosophy appealing. In his biography Ellmann gives a great deal of space to Wilde’s aestheticism. Other critics also stress the importance of aesthetics to Wilde’s corpus. Megan Becker-Leckrone, for example. “Oscar Wilde (1854-190): Aesthetics and Criticism,” connects Wilde to Derrida and Foucault, all of whom according to the article “share a common critical lineage, albeit on separate sides of the ‘metaphysical rupture brought about by Saussurean linguistics’” (661). The preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, according to Becker-Leckrone, is a “pithy” compendium of all of Wilde’s previous essays on aesthetics (658). The crux of the aesthetic philosophy is, “largely coherent and complex aesthetic theory of ‘art for art’s sake’ derived from the aestheticism of Walter Pater, though not merely derivative of it” (658). The article ends by claiming that “epistemological desire” is at the heart of both creativity and the critical impulse, and that this desire is central to understanding the aesthetics of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and of Wilde’s other work as well.

Sheldon Waldrep argues that while Wilde is associated with various movements in literature, such as the decadent movement as well as the Hellenistic movement, and he is often associated by critics with homosexual transgression, the most important

movements to associate him with are the aesthetic movement and realism. These themes all have a clear Sappho connection. Waldrep argues that for Wilde “realism embodied an absolute value for aesthetics” (2), and that it is the aesthetic rather than the homoerotic or homosexual that is central to Wilde’s notion of Ancient Greek beauty. Wilde, according to Waldrep, wanted to combine what is best in Ancient Greek Hellenism with what is best in the new world, and especially realism. Walter Pater, Wilde’s tutor at Oxford, praised *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, for its aesthetic realism, but he seems to distance himself for the suggestive homoeroticism in the novel. Pater, though he is vague about homosexual desire in his own writing, seems to condone Wilde’s realism and his Hellenistic aestheticism, but to condemn his decadence and the homosexual overtones of his Grecophilia.

Waldrep notes that in the concluding chapters of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde focuses on decadent realism, and attempts to represent the gay underworld of London, which linked homosexuality and criminality as part of an erotic fulfillment. The aesthetic of the ideal, as in Lord Henry’s philosophizing, are transformed of realism – real male/male desire which reflects a natural development in Wilde’s aestheticism from abstract ideal beauty to real sexual carnality. This theme of the aesthetics of transgression is explored in greater detail in Joyce Simon’s argument.

Nicholas Frankel, by contrast, in his introduction to his edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, argues that the Aesthetics movement in Britain was influenced by pre-Raphaelite painting and he maintains that this influence is reflected in the long discussions of painting between Lord Henry and Basil in chapter I of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Frankel Gen. Intro. ¶ 24). This kind of portraiture was especially popular in

England in the 1880's and 1890's and is represented in the works of James McNeill Whistler, John Singer Sargent, and G.F. Watts, and was greatly influenced by the art of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Frankel, Gen. Intro. ¶ 24). Rossetti emphasized beauty for its own sake in his paintings, as did other Pre-Raphaelites such as William Morris. According to Frankel, they emphasized the difference between human art and the products that were being made by machines that had come about as a result of the Industrial Revolution (Frankel, Gen. Intro. ¶ 25). The Pre-Raphaelites and the Aesthetic movement after them, sought to beautify life and art. For example, they would make sitters look more beautiful, and elaborate by means of the lushness and quality of their clothing. This emphasized the beauty, whether real or potential, in the composition. Wilde himself had been a lecturer on art and aesthetics before he wrote *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and when he defended it against attacks after its publication, he often used aesthetic arguments. In one of his defenses of the novel, he wrote "I am quite incapable of understanding how any work of art can be criticized from a moral standpoint. The sphere of art and the sphere of ethics are absolutely distinct and separate..." (Frankel, Gen. Intro. ¶ 23).

Walter Pater in his essay collection *Appreciations*, makes clear the connection between writing in the Aesthetic movement and the visual art of the time. As Frankel points out, in chapter nine of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde "abandons dialogue and narrative technique in favor of language that approaches prose poetry" (Frankel, Gen. Intro. ¶ 26). The beauty of the prose, the language, the words, the aesthetics, is as important to Wilde as the plot. Rather than being a realist, Wilde wants to emphasize the aesthetic beauty and strangeness of the world of the novel. Pater was a fellow in Classics

at Brasenose College, Oxford while Wilde was a student at Oxford. Pater argued for the importance of sensual experience and of being willing to live outside of conventional boundaries, especially for the sake of beauty – and the emphasis was on a Sapphic rather than a Homeric aesthetic. Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, published the year before Wilde entered Oxford, angered many readers because of its Hellenistic aestheticism and homoeroticism and started a controversy that was similar to the subsequent controversy surrounding *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Frankel, Gen. Intro. ¶ 27).

One critic who has discussed Wilde's aesthetics at length is Heather Seagroatt who examines the scientific nature of Lord Henry's aesthetics and Wilde's attack on simple dichotomies between science and art, and his distaste for the "overconfidence" of scientific materialism. The dilettantism of both Lord Henry and Dorian are interpreted as an example of materialism gone wrong because it has sought to replace and undermine classical aesthetics (742). The problem, according to this reading, and contra ATV (see Bernal below), with Dorian, is not that he mistakes beauty for virtue, but that he mistakes objectivity and scientific dispassion for true aesthetic beauty and feeling. Bernal reviews the use of Colin McGinn's "Aesthetic Theory of Virtue" or ATV and his application of this to *the Picture of Dorian Gray*. According to McGinn and ATV, in short ATV suggests that the beauty of soul leads to virtue and ugliness of the soul leads to vice. (307). This simple theory has an intuitive appeal according to Bernal. In terms of *Dorian Gray*, McGinn maintains that it shows that characters can surround themselves with sensuous beauty, but not internalize this beauty in their souls, and that the beauty can have no moral connection (308). Lord Henry says that morals are subservient to art, and

he tells Dorian that he should avoid conventional morality because it will interfere with his pursuit of aesthetic beauty. In the novel this leads to Dorian's terrible end, and according to Bernal's summary of McGinn, this is consonant with ATV because beauty cannot be opposed to virtue because virtue is beauty (Becker-Leckrone 311). Dorian, according to ATV, does not single-mindedly pursue aesthetic beauty because he neglects to pursue one of the most important types of beauty – beauty of the soul (Becker-Leckrone 311). Dorian, then, ends up with an ugly soul.

In an article related to Seagroatt's, Sheldon Leibman, claims that the opposition of the ethics of the character Basil in the novel and the aesthetics of Henry is only one aspect of the debate. The "morality" of Basil and the "insouciance" of Henry represent the two sides that Dorian is unable to reconcile. Joyce Carol Oates, in her article on the novel, contrasts the distinction between the "daylight aesthetics" in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* which was noted by James Joyce, and the deeper "cautionary" even "elegiac tone" of much of the story, notably the ending (419). She notes Walter Pater's influence on Wilde and mentions that the "unutterable longing" that Pater found in Shakespeare, is also apparent in *Dorian Gray*. She discusses the hybridity of the novel, tragedy/comedy, Gothic/Romance, but suggests that the aesthetics of the novel is best characterized as an aesthetics of longing and despair (420).

Another focus of Wilde scholarship is to connect the aesthetic theory in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* with crime and transgression – this might be called the dark Sapphic – including homosexuality which was a punishable crime in early twentieth century England. Joyce Simon, for example, is concerned with the aesthetics of crime. She is especially motiveless and exceptional criminality. She notes that the novel sparked

an interest in the aesthetics of crime. The desire to see crime itself as a fine art is key here, since it concentrates on exceptional and essentially motiveless actions. She also observes that the novel shifts attention away from lower-class crime, and that Wilde himself becomes a kind of criminal aesthete when he is tried for homosexuality (Simon 503). Dorian is the prototype, according to the article, of a kind of gentleman criminal, who breaks the law not for gain but just for the sake of transgressing boundaries. His contempt for the people around him, and his single-minded focus on aesthetic and sensuous pleasure allows him to justify his criminality on aesthetic grounds. He breaks laws, engages in illicit sex, uses drugs, fights, even commits murder, because, in part, he thinks it is aesthetically beautiful to do so, and he thinks of himself as a kind of superman who is not really bound by the laws which are for the little people (Simon 508).

Clearly one form of transgression at issue in this line of inquiry is Wilde's homosexual orientation, but in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian is a sexual predator more explicitly of women, such as Sybil Vane, as well as various other behaviors that modern readers would agree are despicable. Dorian's implicit, perhaps latent, homosexuality is not really a crime per se in the novel, rather it is a non-crime, both in that he may not actually be homosexual and because even if he were modern readers, at least, are not likely to perceive homosexual orientation as being criminal – in fact, we see the British legal system as being benighted and unfairly discriminatory.

Yet another line of inquiry seeks to combine Wilde's aesthetics with his sexual preference. A number of critics note that not only Pater's ideas about aesthetics but also

Pater's notions about sex and sexual promiscuity were very influential on Wilde. For example, "Pater had been implicated in a scandal with an undergraduate, William Money Hardings, known as 'The Bugger of Baliol'" (McKenna 13). The influence of aestheticism, which according to Neil McKenna "seemed to spring into life, fully formed, towards the end of the 1870's and was a heady mix of art, idealism and politics which sought to propagate a new gospel of Beauty...a hybrid which drew on diverse strands of radical thinking..." The aesthetes believed that the very idea of beauty had the power to change the world (McKenna 13). Pater, himself, apparently thought that Wilde had gone too far in the *Picture of Dorian Gray*, and had exposed himself to danger. Others described the aesthetics of the novel as "bold," "unwholesome," but "artistically and psychologically interesting" (McKenna 137).

Some critics, however, turn the focus away from aesthetics, whether Hellenic or Sapphic, and rather emphasize victimization. Esther Rashkin and others, see Dorian as both a victim and a perpetrator of homosexual abuse. Her article focuses on the "entirely overlooked" aspect of emotional abuse and child abuse in *the Picture of Dorian Gray* (69). The reading takes Dorian as having been sexually and emotionally abused by Lord Henry. It concludes that Wilde may have intended a link between oppression and even abuse and creative power and expression. His aesthetic creation is a kind of denigration of his own "vile" and "corrupt" sexuality because he was a victim, as was Dorian, of Victorian repression and social abuse in terms of homosexuality. The article seems to make victimization into an interpretive methodology as well as an aesthetic. It seems a stretch to think of Dorian as a victim as much as a perpetrator or to see Wilde as

repressed and disgusted by his homosexuality (80). The article also adduces very little in the way of textual evidence to support its claims.

Other critics, such as Nils Clausen, point to the diversity of the readings of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, but then opts to read the play as a genre – a parable of decay. He mentions the influence of Pater and Poe, and argues that the plot of degeneration takes over from the aesthetic, and Poe's aesthetic as we argued in a previous chapter is quintessentially Sapphic. The goal of homosexual liberation that is mentioned by Lord Henry becomes the degenerative impulse that undermines the aesthetic according to Clausen who argues that degeneration and homosexuality are conflated in the plot. Quoting the critic Ed Cohen, Clausen observes: "Dorian's 'personality onto an esthetic consideration of artistic creatin...Wilde demonstrates ho the psychosexual development of an individual gives raise to the 'Double consciousnesses of a marginalized group.' I was precisely the explicitness of the homosexual theme, we must not fort that outrages many early reviewers" (346). Clausen argues that the very restrictions that Dorian transgresses in pursuit of an aesthetic "Hellenistic ideal" lead to his degeneration, especially his sexual libertinism. While Pater's heroes do not necessarily lead a double life, Dorian does lead such a life and Clausen compares him to Dr. Jekyll here, and quotes Elaine Showalter who describes Robert Louis Stevenson the "*fin-de-siecle* laureate of the double life" (351). According to Clausen in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde cannot any alternative to "repression other than degeneration" and claims that it is actually hostile in theme to Pater's aesthetic notion of self-actualization (362). Rather than leading to aesthetic liberation, Dorian's transgression of boundaries, especially sexual ones, leads to despair.

There is also, of course, a school of criticism that focuses on homoerotic attraction, and this is one element of the clearest Sappho connection between Sappho and Wilde in the scholarship. Carolyn Lesjak, for example, in a very dense article which includes reference to Scientific theories, especially Darwinian theory, argues essentially that the “bending” in *Dorian Gray*, especially as it involves his sexual deviance are devices with which Wilde critiques simple notions of what is “livable,” what is “possible,” and what is “the real” versus what is “the unreal.”

The “vacillations” of Wilde’s aesthetic practice and its relationship to Darwinian evolution are a central concern for Lesjak (19). She compares the mutations and evolutions among animals to the sort of mutation that occurs to Dorian. “Bending” and mutation are analogized and it seems that Dorian mutation, though it might at first have seemed a reasonable aesthetic response to a new environment, and might have been a mutation that led to the thriving of the organism, turns out like most mutations to be counterproductive. The perceived aesthetic and cultural relativism, meets a hard underlying absolute, and Dorian. Atomic theory according to Lesjak, who uses the work of John Dalton, supplies the relativism, but runs up against an absolute.

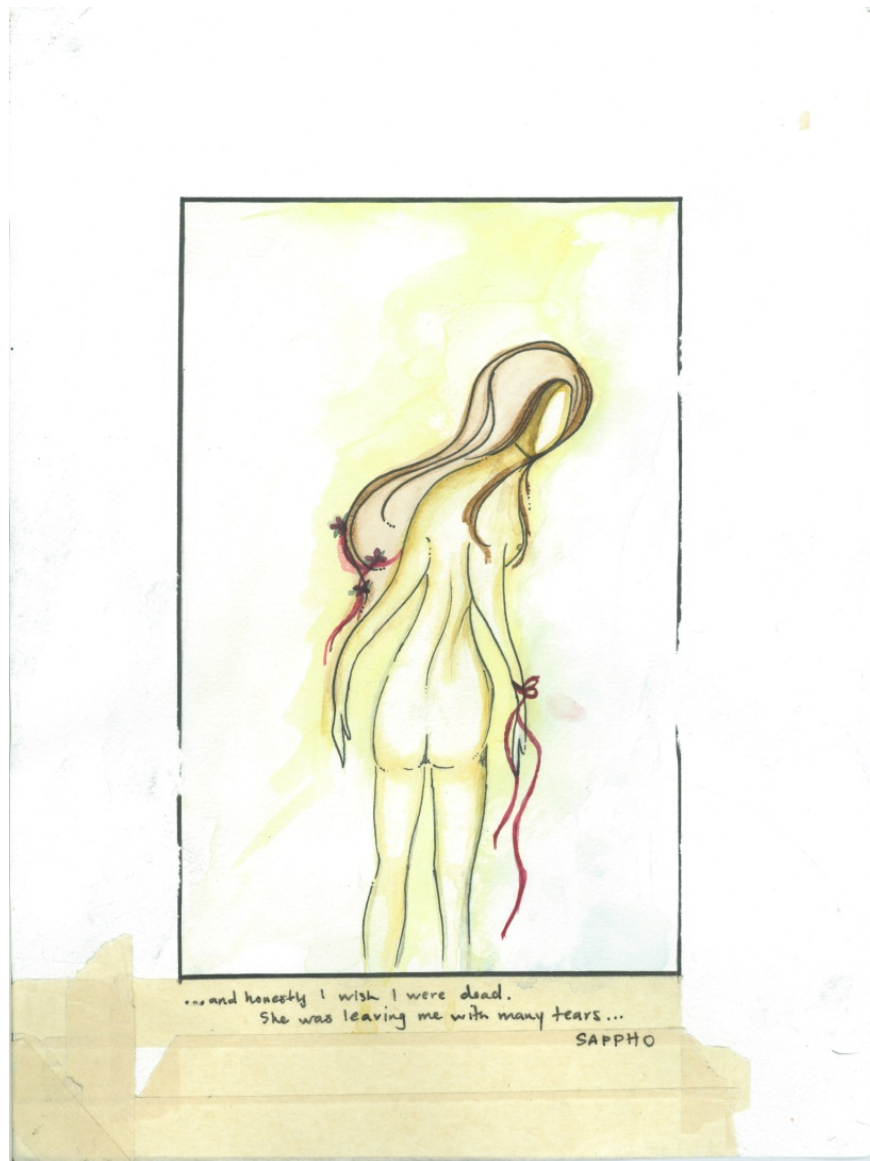
Lesjak quotes a story about a visit Wilde made to the house biologist T.H. Huxley. After the visit Huxley reportedly vowed: “that man never enters my house again” (5). Huxley, a kind of scientific materialist, apparently found the aesthetic relativism of Wilde deplorable. Huxley distinguished between the “slippage between materialism and sensualism, which in turn entailed an easy slide into licentiousness, improper sexual attachments, that is, nonmarital and same-sex, especially male-male, sexual relations (given the propensities of Wilde, Sinburne, and Pater), and various other forms of

debauchery and hedonism” (7-8). For Huxley the pure relativism was dangerous, and in the end that seems to be the theme of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as well. Aestheticism, especially aesthetic relativism, are counter to scientific materialism, and are dangerous.

The critical debate surrounding the relative importance of Oscar Wilde’s sexual orientation and sexual behavior, and his aesthetic commitment, as well as the Sapphic influence, is likely to carry on for many years. Some critics contend that Wilde himself should not be taken as a flag-bearer for homosexual transgression, nor should he be identified too closely with the character Dorian Gray. It is argued that the aesthetics and the sexual preference of Wilde may be related, but that they are not the same. Aesthetics, most critics agree, should remain a primary focus of scholarly research and discussion. In fact, Wilde’s aestheticism predates his homosexuality, and his idea of Greek Love was not necessarily physical. It also could be, and it seems that it was early on for Wilde, Platonic.

Wilde’s aestheticism, however, as we see evidenced in his discussion in *The Artist as Critic* with which I began his chapter, is clearly informed by Sappho. His love of art for art’s sake and his willingness, as reflected in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, to transcend conventional boundaries for the sake of art and beauty, did lead, as it did with Walter Pater, to sexual experimentation. It is also true that the experimentation led to his discovery of a non-traditional sexual preference, but this need not have been the case. The aestheticism is central to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and to most of Oscar Wilde’s work, while the modern emphasis on sexual politics tends to obscure the aesthetics. The modern focus on Wilde’s and Sappho’s sexual preference, while no doubt valuable in interesting, is problematic in as much as it may distract attention from the aesthetic

beauty of their work.



Chapter 5

“HE HEARD THE STARS”:

THE SHADOWS OF SAPPHO IN DEREK WALCOTT’S *OMEROS*

Although the influence of Homer on Derek Walcott’s *Omeros* is manifest in the title, the characters (i.e. Achilles, Philoctetes, Helen, and Hector), and in the theme of conquest and conflict in the poem, there are other Classical influences that are important although less obvious. Another Ancient Greek poet whose work is relevant and influential is Sappho of Lesbos who post-dates Homer by about 150 years. Sappho was a lyric poet who lived on the isle of Lesbos in the 7th century BC. She is relevant and influential to *Omeros* in terms of imagery, structure and theme. Thematically, Walcott, like Sappho, focuses on love and loss; her imagery like Walcott’s is redolent with color and texture--purple, women, landscapes, the sky, the moon and nature. It is more lyrical than Homer. Structurally, Walcott seems to invoke Sappho and some critics argue that the Sapphic stanza is central to the poetics of *Omeros*—the ebb and flow of the line, the very music of the poetry that calms and appeals to the reader is Sapphic.⁴ It is even

⁴ A “Sapphic” poem is either a poem inspired by Sappho’s imagery or the most typical meter of her longer poems. According to Henry Thornton Wharton in his *Life of Sappho*: “The metre commonly called after her name was probably not invented by her; it was only called Sapphic because of her frequent use of it.” (27).

possible though perhaps extreme and overly reductive, to characterize Colonialism as being Homeric, epic and masculine, whereas post colonialism could be characterized as feminine Sapphic and lyrical; in any case, both Sappho and Homer, Colonialism and post-Colonialism, are critical to understanding and appreciating Walcott's *Omeros* (Figueroa 25).

As Lance Callahan evidences in his dissertation, *Omeros* makes frequent use of the *adonaic* line which is the 4th line of a Sapphic stanza. Here is an Adonaic/Sapphic line from Chapter 2 eighth tercet of *Omeros* which is metrically Sapphic but also thematically and imagistically resonate of Sappho:

x -- -- x x -- x x -- x x --

Of silk swirled / at her ank / les like surf / without noise (Callahan 34-5)

While Callahan notes the Sapphic meter, his study does not take into account Sapphic imagery or theme, both of which are evidenced in the above line which emphasizes the female body, most notably the ankle which was a locus of eroticism in Ancient Greek

The long syllables in scansion are typically indicated by macrons “ – “ and the short syllables are indicated with either a “u” or an “x”:

— u — — u — — u — — u — — u — — u
 — u — — u — — u — — u — — u — — u
 — u — — u — — u — — u — — u — — u
 — u — — u — — u — — u — — u

lyric poetry and in Ancient Greek culture generally (Levine 56). The alliterations in the line are also redolent of certain lines of Sappho as is the imagery of surf and silence.

In certain Sappho fragments, such as 51, we see similar alliterations on the “d” sound as well as the “ps” and “s”.

There are two transliterations of the fragment:

ψαύην δ' οὐ δοκίμωμ' ὀράνω †δυσπαχέα† “with my two arms I do not expect to touch the sky”

Even more relevant is fragment 16, which alliterates on the “b” in the first line and focuses on the feminine footfall.

τᾶς κε βολλοίμαν ἔρατόν τε βᾶμα
κάμάρυγμα λάμπρον ἴδην προσώπω (Loeb 67)

She whose gentle footfall and radiant face
Hold the power to charm more than a vision

Daniel Levine points out about these lines that Sappho is comparing beauty with military images, and preferring the former. Walcott too, while he uses Homeric themes is fixated on aesthetics, and the beauty of nature and on feminine beauty. His Helen

represents the land which predates the colonialist invasions and he suggests the possibility of a return to the pre-colonial beauty. According to Charles Lock Helen herself is binary Helen linking both Asiatic and European culture (21). Other lines in *Omeros* such as "Smile for the tourists," jam in our jacket," and "give us the spirit" all mirror the Sapphic line and are emphasize the uneven motion of Philoctete's speech in this section of the poem.

“Just as the nightingales had forgotten his lines
cameras, not chimeras, saw his purple sea
as a postcard archipelago with gnarled pines

and godless temples, where the end of poetry
was a goat bleating down from the theatre steps
while the myrtles rustled like the dry sails of ships” (290)

The lines here suggest to me not so much Homer or Ovid, but Sappho, and some critics have argued that Walcott uses Sapphic meter as a form for much of his lyric verse. The “purple sea” is like Sappho’s purple and the careful echo, alliteration, and rhyme of “cameras” and “chimeras” is clearly both classical, the Chimera (Χίμαιρα) being a mythical classical beast with the body of a lion, the head of a goat, and a tail that ends in a snakes head. It is itself a kind of confluence, but a troubled one, opposed to the modern

“camera” which like Walcott’s poetry records the beauty of the scene, the “purple sea,” “gnarled pines,” and “godless temples.” In this imagery both classical and modern are combined, but even the chimera is re-invoked in the “goat” which in a line which could have been lifted from Sappho (but wasn’t) “bleats down from the theatre steps / while the myrtles rustle.” Camera is from Ancient Greek “kamara” which is a “vaulted chamber” and myrtle trees (*Paphiae myrtus*) are associated with Aphrodite in classical poetry, Paphian refers to sexual desire and eros while myrtle is cognate with the name myrhh. There is depth then to the meaning of the language but the words are deracinated, and like the wandering goat in the passage convey multiple meanings. The goat makes us think of the country side, shepherds, a idyllic scene, but also suggests, especially because of its “bleating,” animal sacrifice in the temple it wanders towards.

Timothy Hofmeister argues that Walcott invokes and employs both classical sources such as Homer and Ovid, as well as African and Caribbean, but also other traditions to move to a kind of holistic reconciliation and reinvention leading to an excellence and deeply referential depth of poetic language. The argument can be metaphorically summarized as a championing a kind of linguistic/poetic/cultural confluence which results in a powerful flow of poetry empowered but not determined by its various tributaries. The result according to Hofmeister, quoting Joseph Brodsky, is a poem in which poetic language itself leads to “self-betterment” and allows for an identity which transcends “class, race, and ego” (128). Though he does not discuss the influence of Sappho directly, he does focus on various classical elements which contribute to the aesthetic excellence of some of the poetry in *Omeros*. Hofmeister analysis suggests that the poem is a kind of river that early on is troubled and inchoate and builds as various

tributaries feed into it, and though Hofmeister does not discuss it, one of the most interesting tributaries is Sapphic.

According to Hofmeister, Walcott's conflicted uses of the Ancient Greek poet Homer in "his two most recent works" *Omeros* and a play based on Homer's *Odyssey*. Because many critics considered Walcott a champion of Caribbean language and culture, and a chronicler of the difficulty inherent in balancing his mixed heritage, Hofmeister claims that Walcott's use of Homer is a potentially a "provocation" which needs to be "meticulously explained" (107). This provocation is emphasized by Omotayo Oloruntoba-Oju in his article "The Redness of Blackness" which discusses the "scathing criticism" that has been leveled at Walcott for essentially selling out to European literature (16). But as Oloruntoba-Oju notes, Walcott strives for balance and fusion rather than purity. Timothy Hofmeister, for his part, argues that rather than assimilate or over-identify with Homer, Walcott rather seeks to find a "balance on the axis of shared responsibility". Hofmeister, along with other critics, opines that this balance means that neither Homer nor Walcott dominate, and Walcott does not "assimilate" Homer, but rather the two poets find a balance within the poem and both of them "become fully themselves" (110). But the balance is actually tripartite at least, and the influence of Sappho's aesthetic as well as her metrical line are critical to Walcott's own aesthetics and prosody.

The Sapphic influence is also suggested obliquely by Walcott's attempt to achieve the "Adamic" state in which he can access the original language, to both go back to a pure prelapsarian original language and to reinvent language afresh. With this "Adamic"

perfection Walcott seeks to go both back to origins and forward to a new language, and the (Hofmeister 111).

Walcott's desire to return to a more pristine and direct, Sapphic language is reflected in the character Achille. Book two of *Omeros* can be read as a struggling to a kind of understanding and reconciliation of both meaning and language. This is especially true in the interchanges between Achille, who is drifting at sea and hallucinates a homecoming to Africa and a reconciliation with his father. Achille, who must on some level represent Walcott here, has to learn to reintegrate the African element of his linguistic and cultural identity, and thereby gain access to the true and perfect language which mankind understood before the fall.

Achille. What does the name mean? I have forgotten the one that I gave you. But it was, it seems, many years ago.

What does it mean?

Achille

Well, I too have forgotten.

Everything was forgotten. You also. I do not know.

The deaf sea has changed around every name that you gave

Us, trees, men we yearn for a sound that is missing.

Afolabe

The name means something. The qualities desired in a son,
And even a girl-child; so even the shadows who called you expected on
virtue, since every name is a blessing,

Since I am remembering the hope I had for you as a child.
Unless the sound means nothing. Then you would be nothing.
Did they think you were nothing in that other kingdom?

Achille

I do not know what the name means. It means something,
Maybe. What's the difference? In the world I come from
We accept the sounds we are given. Men, trees, water. (137-8)

It is the “meaning” the one to one correspondence between the word and thing that is essential here. The perfect word stands for what Achille and Walcott aspire to. They want to eliminate arbitrariness from language and make the connection between sign and signified an absolute. This romantic ideal leads in the poem to the full absorption and reintroduction of influence from Homer to Afolabe and results in the later lyricism, which aspires to a Sapphic perfection in both form and resonance:

“Just as the nightingales had forgotten his lines
cameras, not chimeras, saw his purple sea

as a postcard archipelago with gnarled pines
and godless temples, where the end of poetry
was a goat bleating down from the theatre steps
while the myrtles rustled like the dry sails of ships” (290)

The lines here suggest not so much Homer or Ovid, but Sappho, and are reinforced by Walcott’s use Sapphic meter as a form for much of his lyric verse (Callahan 54). The “purple sea” is like Sappho’s purple and the careful echo, alliteration, and rhyme of “cameras” and “chimeras” is clearly both classical, the Chimera (Χίμαιρα) being a mythical classical beast with the body of a lion, the head of a goat, and a tail that ends in a snakes head. It is itself a kind of confluence, but a troubled one, opposed to the modern “camera” which like Walcott’s poetry records the beauty of the scene, the “purple sea,” “gnarled pines,” and “godless temples.” In this imagery both classical and modern are combined, but even the chimera is re-invoked in the “goat” which in a line which could have been lifted from Sappho (but wasn’t) “bleats down from the theatre steps / while the myrtles rustle.” Camera is from Ancient Greek “kamara” which is a “vaulted chamber” and myrtle trees (*Paphiae myrtus*) are associated with Aphrodite in classical poetry, Paphian refers to sexual desire and *eros*, while myrtle is cognate with the name myrhh. There is depth then to the meaning of the language but the words are deracinated, and like the wandering goat in the passage convey multiple meanings.⁵ The goat makes us

⁵ John Van Sickle notes a number of these classically inspired puns in *Omeros* (39)

think of the country side, shepherds, an idyllic pastoral scene as one might find on the Grecian urn described by John Keats, but also suggests, especially because of its “bleating,” animal sacrifice in the temple it wanders towards (Lock 23).

Key to appreciating and understanding the aesthetic and the poetic line in this, arguably the most beautiful section of *Omeros*, is Sappho’s “Hymn to Aphrodite” which emphasizes the connection between beauty and nostalgic melancholy.⁶ Earlier too, in the lines between Helen and Achille the relevance of Aphrodite and Sapphic beauty are remarkable:

“...He tried but could not distinguish/their pattern, nor call one Venus, or even find

⁶ Ποικιλόθρον', ἀθάνατ' Ἀφρόδιτα,
παῖ Δίος, δολόπλοκε, λίσσομαί σε
μή μ' ἄσαισι μήτ' ὀνίαισι δάμνα,
πότνια, θυμόν·(Loeb 52)

[Iridescent-throned](#) Aphrodite, deathless

Child of Zeus, wile-weaver, I now implore you,

Don't--I beg you, Lady--with pains and torments

Crush down my spirit,

But before if ever you've heard my pleadings

Then return, as once when you left your father's

[Golden](#) house; you yoked to your shining car your

Wing-whirring sparrows;

the pierced holes of Pisces, the dots named for the Fish;
he know them as stars, they fitted his own design...

It was so quiet in the village he heard the stars...

He saw how she wished for a peace beyond her beauty,
past the tireless quarrel over a face that was not her own fault
any more than the full moon's grace sailing dark trees" (114-5)

Sappho's significance to *Omeros* on the thematic, aesthetic, and prosodic levels is both broad and deep. The resonance of the Sapphic oxymoron, and the Adonaic line, as well as Walcott's emphasis on the beauty of the feminine and of nature, suggest a reading of *Omeros* as a post-colonial work which juxtaposes and seeks to reconcile the masculine, colonialist, and Homeric perspective with a post-colonial, feminine, and Sapphic one. This dichotomy reflects a larger conflict and confluence between European/African/Caribbean cultures and literatures which is central to the thematics of the poem. In the end though, what is most remarkable, is the excellent poetry which results from Walcott's expansive and inclusive aesthetic.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSIONS

It is true that very little is known about the poetess Sappho of Lesbos. What we do know is that Sappho was born in the Archaic Greek period, 625 BC and dies during the Classical Period 570 BC. It seems that Sappho had sisters and brothers, which in recent findings Sappho's New Poem is to one of her brothers. It also appears that Sappho was married and had a daughter named Cleis, who is also mentioned and described in her fragments. In antiquity Sappho was considered among the greatest of poets. Sappho's poems were written nearly two hundred years after Homer's epics, and they can be seen as a female centered, aesthetic response to the macho, patriarchal, and even phallogentric world of Homer (Norton 636). Despite the fact that Sappho's poems were written so long ago her words and lyrics are filled with rich descriptions that captivate readers still today. Sappho's grace and gentle expressions that are simple and yet so beautiful. Sappho's poems are concerned with feelings, and feminine beauty. She is an inspiration to writers and readers, past and present. Sappho was one of the most famous and important poets of the classical world, she is called the "tenth muse" by Plato, and at one time there were many volumes of her work available. Sappho's work was collected in 9 volumes in the library at Alexandria, which was burned some time during the late classical period.

My interest in Sappho as a creative writer and visual artist is in large due to her simplicity and directness. She says what she feels with clarity and force. It is not a

surprise that so many writers turn to for inspiration, as well as, during times of suffering for comfort as Hilda Doolittle did. H.D.'s *Wise Sappho*, was written during a spell of depression. H.D. turned to Sappho. J.D. Salinger, whose *Raise High the Roof Beam Carpenters*, is taken from fragment 91 of Sappho continuously make reference to Sappho as almost an air that surrounds his work.

Salinger's novella title comes from Sappho's Fragment 91, "Raise high the roof beam, carpenters. Like Ares comes the bridegroom, taller far than a tall man." This is said to be a fragment of a wedding song which goes along side with what absorbs Salinger's novel, the wedding that leads up to the suicide of Seymour Glass. Salinger however does not stop there, he refers to Sappho again in his novel *Franny and Zooey*. "For her, however, she looks down on all the poets except Sappho, whom she quotes." (23) Salinger's knowledge in Sappho was fundamental to his writing. Anne Carson is also one of the many poets inspired by Sappho.

In Sappho's poetry there is a clear emphasis on love and Eros and neither are censored or simplified by the poetess. Most often, however, there is an obvious emphasis on the poet's own suffering caused by "bittersweet" love, lovesickness and the longing, lust, uncertainty and unrequited love. Her attitude towards love both negatively and positively pull to both readers and writers. Sappho's reputation and fame celebrates erotic love, beauty, colors, emotions and subjective experience.

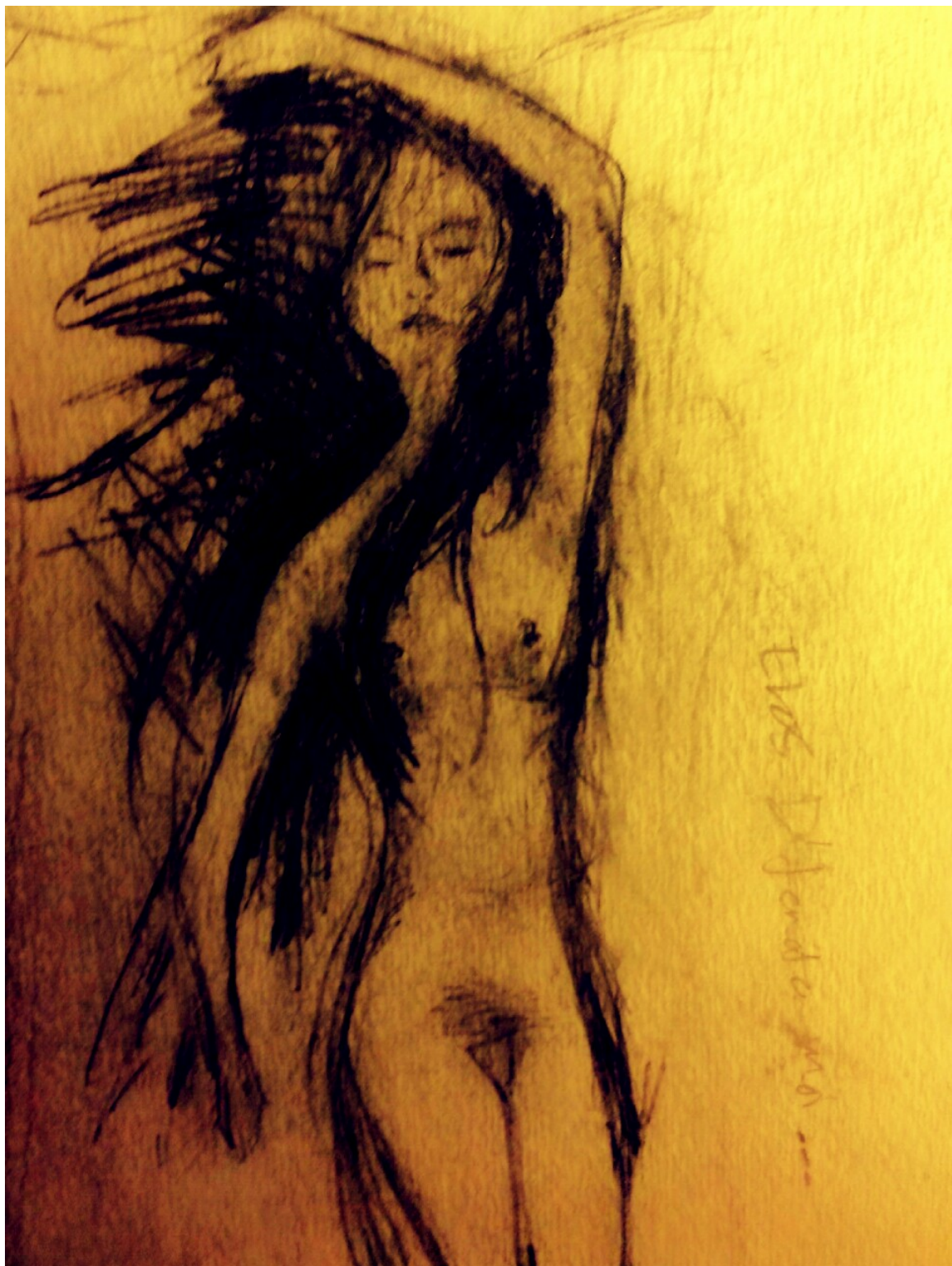
One small fragment, like Fragment 38, "you burn me." Can simply be read as the poet's suffering from love. Or her more powerful and evoking fragments of the poet she

declares, “Love shook me, like wind on a tree...” Fragment 94 of Sappho is one of Sappho’s longer and fragmentary work about a sad parting between two people and the efforts of one to comfort the other. There are many different interpretations and translations of Sappho’s poem and its effects may vary person to person, but for me her poems inspires me and fills me with intrigue.

Fragment 94, illustrates an affair where two lovers are forced to separate from each other despite the bonding love they have for each other. The young girl we see, through her words, is desperately saddened, but is comforted by the wiser and older mistress who we know to be Sappho. Sappho’s role is the calm lover because it seems that she has decided to remember the beauty they shared rather than morn for what they cannot have. Sappho with much grace and authority commands her grief stricken lover to not look back in tears, but to remember with smiles of the love they shared. Sappho’s verbal painting of both the agony of the young girl leaving and their past delights together.

Her work though perhaps composed in writing was meant to be performed orally with the accompaniment of a lyre, perhaps even sang. Sappho’s manipulation of language and the reality that she describes allow us a glimpse of her world. Sappho as the poetess and illustrator behind these amazing poem, her evocative nature of poetry stimulates the past in such a way as to fascinate the present with her world. It is the poetry and art of beauty, erotic longing and passionate love that her fragments project. Her poetry brings moments of the past to life and enchants readers all over the world. She provides to us an example of how someone remembering the past pleasures of love can use those memories to cure present sadness. In the literary world Sappho’s importance is profound and has had a great impact on poetry. Her celebration of love and expression continues to echo

through numerous writers, leaving us with a reminder of the importance of her feminine Greek influence in literature.



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