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# 'FEARLESS, BLOODLESS . . . LIKE THE GODS': SAPPHO 31 AND THE RHETORIC OF 'GODLIKE'

Poem 31 in our collections of Sappho's fragments is so well-known both through the original version, quoted partially by 'Longinus' (*De sublimitate* 10.1–3), and through Catullus' adaptation (no. 51), that it is difficult to achieve sufficient distance from one's preconceptions to permit reappraisal. For the poem has in the modern period elicited such startlingly contradictory responses that one wonders whether we may not all along have been missing, or misconstruing, some point which was obvious enough to Sappho and her listeners.[1]

A major source of dissent among modern interpreters of the poem concerns the question of jealousy: is Sappho moved to such convulsions of emotion by jealousy at seeing her beloved girlfriend in intimate colloquy with a man, or is she not?[2] For the situation is, simply put, the following: a man is said to be godlike who sits opposite a certain girl, enjoying her conversation and her laughter. This, says Sappho, makes her boil over with a mixture of passionate emotions. Now one may take these emotions either as a response to the sight of her beloved girlfriend talking to a man (that is, jealousy), or one may refer the emotions described to the love Sappho feels for the girl under 'normal' circumstances: the man is simply extraordinarily fortunate ('like the gods') in enjoying her affection.[3]

This leads to the second major area of disagreement in the recent history of interpretations of this poem. Some, notably Wilamowitz, believed that the latter line of reasoning was more correct, and that the poem as a whole might serve in praise of the girl and her manfriend as a bridal couple. In short the poem was formally a hymeneal, a song of praise of the bride and, less directly, the groom.[4] This position drew forth all

[1] For fuller bibliography of recent studies, see Joel B. Lidov, 'The second stanza of Sappho fr. 31: another look', *AJP* 114 (1993), 503–35 (bibl. 533–5); G. W. Most, 'Reflecting Sappho', *BICS* (1995), 15–38 (bibl. 34–8).

[2] M. Marcovich, 'Sappho fr. 31: anxiety attack or love declaration?', *CQ* 22 (1972), 19–32, at 20, identifies the first proponent of the jealousy thesis as H. J. Heller in *Philologus* 11 (1856), 432; D. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (Oxford, 1955), 19–33, is perhaps its strongest recent advocate. D. A. Campbell, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Bristol, 1982), 271, writes: 'Sappho sets out the physical concomitants of her love when jealousy inflames it.' Most (n. 1), 28: '. . . just what is Sappho responding to? Is she expressing sexual passion for the woman, or sexual jealousy at the man's relation to the woman, or admiration for the woman's beauty, or admiration at the man's fortitude in enduring the woman's beauty, or some mixture of these, or something else?' with n. 65: '. . . there is a clear drift in the last decades towards interpreting the poem as an expression of homoerotic passion for the woman concerned . . .'

[3] For example, C. M. Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Oxford, 1961), 188: 'She means rather that in her eyes the man seems to enjoy a divine felicity and is at this moment like the gods in the inestimable happiness of holding the girl's attention.'

[4] Wilamowitz, *Sappho und Simonides* (Berlin, 1913), 56ff. Cf. B. Snell, *Hermes* 66 (1931), 71ff. (= *Gesammelte Schriften* [Göttingen, 1966], 82–97. On p. 82 Snell speaks of the '. . . Tatsache, daß es ein Hochzeitsgedicht ist, wie Wilamowitz gesehen hat, ein Glückwünsch und Abschied für eines der Mädchen, das in Sapphos Kreise gelebt hat.' But J. Latacz, 'Realität und Imagination. Eine neue Lyrik-Theorie und Sapphos φαίνεταί μοι κῆνος-Lied', *MH* 42 (1985), 67–94, and J. J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire. The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York and London, 1990), 178, continue to see the first stanza as a *makarismos* explicitly or implicitly describing a husband for the girl (though a potential rather than present one).

the critical venom Page could muster in ridiculing the notion of Sappho describing her quite overwhelming feelings of passionate jealousy at somebody's wedding. How unsuitable, he wrote, for a song describing the crippling effects of a woman's passion for the bride to be sung at her wedding! But this brings us back to the first question: was Sappho describing jealous love, or simply love? The signs regarding this question are ambiguous even in antiquity. For 'Longinus' and Plutarch (*Erot.* 18) the piece was a love-poem, a simple description of overwhelming passion; they do not mention jealousy as the trigger setting off Sappho's confusion.[5] Catullus' poem is ambivalent in this respect, but the presence of jealousy is perhaps more likely than simple adoration.[6] Here the (male) poet sees his girlfriend with another man, describes the unpleasant emotions he feels on seeing that, and then girds himself (apparently) for action at the end by saying that 'otium' is against his best interests. He seems to be saying: there's no point sitting around lamenting this situation; action, not indolence, is called for. In fact, I suspect that Catullus' poem is a contributory factor in the modern tendency to read 31 as a poem of jealous love. Catullus sees himself as the worsted rival of the godlike man of the poem; therefore we tend to assume a similar dynamic behind Sappho's emotions: she is dismayed to see a man gaining the affection of a girl she so passionately adored.

Jealousy in love is, of course, an emotion commonly encountered at the most archaic levels of Greek poetry. Hera is vindictively jealous of Zeus' jaunts with other partners; the Trojan War is launched by a mechanism of jealous love; Achilles sulks when he is deprived of Briseis by Agamemnon; Laertes in the *Odyssey* is said to have admired his acquisition Eurykleia as much as his wife, but to have desisted from sex with her for fear of his wife's jealousy (1.430–3); and the list of incidents could be extended further. One certainly cannot rule out jealousy in Sappho's poem on the grounds that the emotion belongs to a later age of 'romantic' love, one which still had to be invented, by and large, by Alexandrian poets exploring the emotions of love in diverse relationships.[7]

Is there any way of deciding this question? Must we continue to debate endlessly the question whether Sappho in this poem was seething with frustrated, jealous love, or simply expressing her love and admiration for a girlfriend? It makes an enormous difference to our appreciation of the poem: in the former case we imagine Sappho as the losing member of a strained triangular situation, one involving quite convoluted sexual relations, as the girl addressed must, one feels, have once been capable of loving Sappho, but now have transferred her affections onto a man who has become her rival.[8] In the latter case we are puzzled both by the nature and intensity of the physical reaction of Sappho to the proximity of her loved friend, and, above all, by the role of

[5] Bowra (n. 3), 186–7, recognizes that 'Longinus' and Plutarch (and others) regarded the poem as an artistic declaration of love for a girl, but goes on to argue that the poem has the immediacy of an actual scene vividly experienced (i.e. witnessing the object of love with a man, not necessarily the groom).

[6] M. J. Edwards, 'Greek into Latin: a note on Catullus and Sappho', *Latomus* 48 (1989), 590–600; P. E. Knox, 'Sappho fr. 31 LP and Catullus 51: a suggestion', *QUCC* 46 (1984), 97–102.

[7] Theokr. 2, 'Pharmakeutria' and Herodas, *Mim.* 5, spring to mind as examples of Hellenistic poems treating the theme of jealousy in sexual love.

[8] G. Devereux, 'The nature of Sappho's seizure in fr. 31 LP as evidence of her inversion', *CQ* 20 (1970), 17–31, maintains that the symptoms of love Sappho describes are typical of a lesbian lover confronted with her partner in a heterosexual relationship. He reads the poem 'clinically'. A basic weakness of this reading is that Sappho and her public would probably not have regarded homosexual love as sick in any way.

the mysterious man. Who is he? Why is he necessary to Sappho's argument? What is his role in the poem, if not that of irksome rival? I believe there is an approach to this problem which has been only partially explored in the past,[9] and that it lies on the one hand in the traditional rhetoric of expressions such as 'godlike' in archaic Greek poetry, and on the other in the structural device known as 'priamel' as a foregrounding technique.[10] Let us take the latter first.

The major achievement of Bundy in his *Studia Pindarica* was to show that Pindaric composition consisted in large measure in the rallying of a number of rhetorical devices all subservient to the main aim of praising and defining the *laudandus*;[11] in particular he pointed to the heightening device of the priamel (Lat. *praeambulum*)—'a focusing or selecting device in which one or more terms serve as foil for the point of particular interest' (p. 3). Expressed generally, the poet says: 'X (or Y or Z) was mighty/handsome/fortunate, but compared to the man I am describing now he was nothing.' In its simplest form the priamel leads up to an object of praise by naming by way of introduction one or more known valences which the *laudandus* is then said to surpass.

Bundy applied the term 'priamel' to almost any type of foil placed so as to heighten the impact of a key term. Later writers tend to restrict the term 'priamel' to cases where a *series* of examples or precedents lead up to the focal point. Race, for example, writes in *The Classical Priamel from Homer to Boethius*, after considering other rhetorical figures such as comparison, *exordium*, climax: 'What gives the priamel its particular character is the fact that an entire *series* leads up *as a group* to some point'.[12] In this article I follow Bundy's use of the term 'priamel' to denote any kind of elaborate foregrounding designed to throw a subject into sharper relief, but other terms such as 'foil' or 'counterpoint' would suffice to make my point about the opening of Sappho's poem. Both the simple foil and the complex priamel work by establishing a standard in the listener's mind against which he can measure the true greatness of the real subject when it is finally introduced. As the priamel builds expectation by delaying mention of the subject, so the listener's mind is prepared in readily acceptable steps for the dénouement (Bundy: 'climax').[13]

A well-known example of priamel structure occurs in Sappho 16.[14] Here the poet

[9] In particular by W. H. Race, '"That Man" in Sappho fr. 31 L-P', *ClAnt* 2 (1983), 92–101; A. P. Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets: Archilochus, Alcaeus, Sappho* (Harvard, 1983), 233–5; Marcovich (n. 2).

[10] Most's solution (n. 1)—to leave the source of Sappho's violent emotion as undetermined as possible—that is, perhaps the girl, perhaps the man-with-girl, perhaps even the man—supports the main thesis of his article (that Sappho's poetry may give rise to a very varied reception) but leaves this reader at least feeling frustrated: how can we sympathize with Sappho's emotions, if we do not even know what causes them? Her poem, we feel, is not a scholarly game, where ambiguity or teasing allusion is at a premium, but rather a heartfelt statement, a *cri de coeur*.

[11] E. L. Bundy, *Studia Pindarica* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962). In vol. I Bundy gave detailed studies of *O.* 11, in II of *I.* 2. He sees behind the elements of a Pindaric ode '. . . the fulfillment of a single purpose through a complex orchestration of motives and themes that conduce to one end'. Key terms in his analysis of priamel are 'foil' (the element used to throw the focus of attention into relief), 'cap' (pronominal cap, name cap: a syntactic marker to cap a foil before naming of climax), 'climax' (the goal to which a priamel or foil had been leading).

[12] W. H. Race, *The Classical Priamel from Homer to Boethius* (Leiden, 1982), 28; similarly T. Krischer, 'Die logischen Formen der Priamel', *GB* 2 (1974), 79–91.

[13] Race (n. 12), 22: 'This withholding of specific information until the very end is an essential feature of the priamel, for it is one of the ways of "closing" or "completing" the form, after having aroused an expectation.'

[14] Cf. H. Saake, *Sapphostudien. Forschungsgeschichtliche, biographische und literatur-ästhetische*

says: 'Some say an army is the finest thing on earth, some say a navy. I say it's what one loves' (1–4). The device is transparent here. First she mentions what others rank highest, then she caps these esteemed objects with her own favourite. The device invites the reader to share the poet's sympathies and inclinations against those holding a different (and allegedly less tenable) opinion.[15]

But not all foils and priamels take such a clearly recognizable form. Explicit signposting of the contrast or comparison intended may be lacking, and sometimes the foil is elaborated to such an extent that its subordination to the following element is easily overlooked. Ibykos' 'spring-time' poem (fr. 286) is just such a case. The poem launches into a description of spring (line 1 *ἦρι μέν*) when apples drink the water of springs, the Garden of the Nymphs[16] flourishes, and the vines put out leaves and flowers. The modern reader, with his experience of nature poetry, jumps to the conclusion that Ibykos is effusing about the wonders of nature in spring, and nearly loses sight of the point of the lines: they serve as contrast (priamel or single-element foil) to Ibykos' description of the power of love which grips him *at all seasons*. Spring in his account is less impressive than his passion because it only occurs once a year, whilst he is burning with desire the whole year long (6–7 *ἐμοὶ δ' ἔρος / οὐδεμίαν κατάκοιτος ὥραν*). It would be a mistake to exaggerate the significance of the opening lines.[17] Spring, despite its beauty, is not the subject of the poem, rather it serves as foil for a still more fecund subject: Ibykos' passion.

Before returning to Sappho 31 to see in what sense the first quatrain may involve priamel techniques, we need the second pillar of my argument, the traditional rhetoric associated with phrases like 'godlike'. To describe someone as 'godlike' was a standard formula of praise in epic language. Apart from the literal expression *ἰσόθεος φώς*, 'godlike man', there are numerous equivalents such as *θεῷ ἐναλίγκιος*, 'equal to a god', or *ἀντίθεος*, 'god-equal', *θεοειδής*, *θεοείκελος* 'godlike'. Beyond this, excellent human achievement in any department was thought to have been inspired or assisted by a god. When Telemachus at the beginning of the *Odyssey* summons up courage to address the suitors in a manly spirit (in fact Athena had just visited him to goad him into action), a suitor comments sardonically after his speech: 'Telemachus, how the gods themselves are teaching you to be a haughty orator and to speak bravely!' (1.384–395). Attractive physical appearance was attributed to a god's assistance at the person's toilet;[18] an accurate spear-throw or arrow-shot drew a nod of thanks to a god's guiding hand; conversely, failure or inadequacy was explained by a god's with- drawing a helping hand or actively punishing a sinner. The divine world offered an ideal

*Untersuchungen* (München, Paderborn and Vienna, 1972), Die Priamel-Ode, 70–4; Race (n. 12), 63ff.

[15] For more on typical structures exhibited by priamels throughout classical literature, see Race (n. 12), esp. 7–30. Krischer (n. 12) classifies priamels according to the relation in which they stand to the main focus of attention; they may be 'kontrastierend', 'spezifizierend', 'relativierend', or 'verabsolutierend'.

[16] The text has *Παρθένων* but, as Campbell says (n. 2), 310: 'The Maidens must be Nymphs, but the title occurs nowhere else.'

[17] As Bowra does (n. 3), 260–3: 'These lines are metaphorical and even symbolical in the sense that they consist entirely of images which stand for something else . . .' I disagree; they stand only for themselves as counterpoint to what follows. Of course, Ibykos is also drawing on the connection often made between spring, the rising of the sap, and human (and animal) lust.

[18] At *Od.* 16.155ff. Athena restores Odysseus' youthful beauty and Telemachus comments that only a *δαίμων* could have worked the change in his appearance (194ff.); at *Od.* 18.187ff. Athena beautifies Penelope after a bath and at 19.54 she is compared to Artemis or Aphrodite. At *Od.* 23.156ff. Athena similarly lends Odysseus grace and stature after a bath.

community of beauty, success, and power, to which aspects of the human world could be related or compared, either to show how they shared in divinity, or came close to it, or to show how lamentably they fell short of the divine ideal. In short, 'godlike' was a standard term of reference to attribute larger-than-life qualities to a person or his/her action.[19]

Likewise, the expression 'one would have to be a god to . . .' (sc. perform some action or possess some attribute) was a way of expressing the difficulty or demanding nature of an undertaking. At *Il.* 12.176 we find Homer himself confessing that one would need divine vision to describe all the action round the defensive wall. That is, a god would have the necessary scope and mental agility to witness and record multifarious scenes of warfare—a task to which the epic poet fears his art will be inadequate. This is a rhetorical way of saying 'What I am about to describe defies the powers of human description and comprehension—bear with my inadequate attempts in the knowledge that the reality was much greater.'[20]

Bearing these preliminary points in mind—the possibility of a foregrounding device acquiring a life of its own (in our unaccustomed minds) beyond its formal purpose, and the formality of such expressions as 'only a god could . . .'—we can return to Sappho 31. The poem, as it survives in [Longinus'] quotation,[21] falls into two clear parts, lines 1 to 4½ in which an external scene is described (man with woman), followed by a list of Sappho's internal emotions and physical symptoms. Whether or not 16 is the last line of the original poem, these two parts belong together as a structural whole as (i) opening φαίνεταί μοι κῆνος is clearly reflected by φαίνομ' ἔμ' αὔτ[αι in 16, effecting closure, and (ii) the final symptom named by Sappho in 15–16, 'I seem to myself to be on the verge of dying', represents the culmination of the list of emotional symptoms. These two parts of the poem hinge on relative τό in 5, which introduces the first symptom ('which makes the heart in my chest lurch/leap/pound'—'instantaneous' aorist, ἐπτόαισεν), caused by something in the previous lines.

Since there is no neuter antecedent in lines 1–5, τό must refer to a part or the whole of the previous scene in a general sense. One of Most's suggestions—that τό might refer to neuter ἰμέροεν immediately preceding it—can be ruled out as that is an adverb (with γελαίσας), and cannot serve as antecedent.[22] Something about the scene she has just described causes Sappho's heart to lurch within her chest. As Most says, what exactly 'it' is, is left tantalizingly indeterminate. I see two main options: (i) the fact *that*

[19] An example close to the situation described by Sappho comes at *Od.* 6.309: Alkinoos seated on a throne drinking wine, next to his weaving wife, looks 'like a god', ἀθάνατος ὥς. Similarly in 7.56ff. Athena tells Odysseus that Alkinoos' wife Arete is revered 'like a god' when she moves through town: οἵ μίν ῥα θεὸν ὣς εἰσορόωντες / δειδέχαται μύθοισιν, ὅτε στείχῃσ' ἀνὰ ἄστυ.

[20] Further examples: at *Il.*10.556 Nestor praises Rhesos' horses and says that a god must have given them to him, as they surpass any he had seen in Troy: this converts to the formula 'You'd have to be a god to possess horses like these.' At *Od.* 6.280 we find an ironical use of the formula 'he's so handsome he must be a god'. A stranger (Nausicaa suggests), seeing her return to town with Odysseus, might think she had fetched herself a husband, in scorn of the Phaeacians, either a shipwrecked sailor or a god in answer to her prayers: τίς δ' ὅδε Ναυσικάᾳ ἔπεται καλός τε μέγας τε / . . . ἤ τίς οἱ εὐξαμένῃ πολυάρητος θεὸς ἦλθεν / οὐρανόθεν καταβάς . . .

[21] Whether the words ἀλλὰ πὰν τόλματον ἐπεὶ καὶ πένητα, which follow in [Longinus] belong to the poem or not, is debated. They are metrically flawed, although a relatively slight emendation such as ἀλλὰ πὰν τόλματον ἐπεὶ πένητι, 'but since everything is endurable for the poorly-off', is at least conceivable. Catullus' adaptation continues for another quatrain, in which he girds himself for action (it seems) rather than inert sloth.

[22] Most (n. 1), 28: 'It (sc. τό) could well refer to the nearest possible antecedent, the woman's laughter, picking up the adjective (*sic*) applied to that laughter, ἰμέροεν.' τό could, however, refer to the *fact* that the girl laughs seductively.

'that man' is sitting beside the girl precipitates the emotions; this reading supports the 'jealousy' interpretation: she sees the man sitting opposite the girl and feels a rage of jealous love; (ii) what *that man* is currently experiencing—the girl's proximity, her sweet voice, and seductive laughter—produces vice versa in Sappho the emotions she then lists.

I believe it is possible to decide between these two alternatives and rule out the 'jealousy' motif. For Sappho gives us a little help in understanding what she means by τό. In line 7 she explains what it is precisely that causes her confusion: ὠς γὰρ ἔς σ' ἴδω βρόχε', ὤς με . . ., 'when I look at you briefly, then I can't talk . . .' We must take initial ὠς in the sense 'whenever', or 'if', as, combined with the so-called 'iterative' subjunctive in this temporal clause (ἴδω) and the present (εἴκει) in the main clause, it denotes a circumstance which can happen on more than one occasion;[23] the 'looking' in this clause is further defined through adverbial βρόχε', 'briefly', giving a sense to the verb of a very short look, or 'glimpse': 'when(ever) I look fleetingly at you, then . . .' or 'whenever I so much as glimpse you . . .' This statement seems more applicable to Sappho's repeated glimpses of the girl alone (or with others) than to repeated glances at *this particular situation*, that is, the girl sitting with this particular man.[24] That σε is the same person as the τοι in line 2 is surely undeniable; 'you' in the first stanza is a woman (as the participles prove), so 'you' in line 7 is also a woman.

Of course, Most is right that ἐς is a modern supplement for the metrically deficient words transmitted, ὠς γὰρ σἴδω, a syllable short. The supplement ἐς is accepted in most modern editions; Most prefers to resuscitate a conjecture by Hermann, εἰσίδω, without σε. This has the advantage, for his purposes, of leaving the object of the seeing indeterminate, tallying with his view of τό in line 5, which is equally indeterminate, 'it'. But we may wonder whether the indeterminate expression 'when I behold' (as Most translates) provides a satisfactory cause for the excruciating emotions which Sappho proceeds to list. The listener demands to know *what* triggers these paroxysms of emotion in Sappho; moreover the γάρ in line 7, which seems poised to provide an explanation of what Sappho had said in lines 5–6 ('which makes my heart pound'), in fact explains nothing, as the words which follow fail to specify the precise sight that triggers Sappho's despair. A further objection to εἰσίδω lies in the adverb βρόχε' that accompanies it. The compound verb εἰσοράω implies more direct, concentrated seeing ('look upon', 'contemplate', Most's 'behold') than simple ὁράω; this sense immediately comes into collision with βρόχε', which means that the vision is fleeting. 'Whenever I look on (what?) briefly . . .' is surely weaker than 'Whenever I so much as glimpse you . . .' Finally, although Catullus' translation does not amount to proof, his text is unequivocal at this point: 'nam simul *te* aspexi . . .'[25]

[23] Cf. Page (n. 2), p. 22 'ὡς with the subjunctive without κε, ἄν, in the sense of ὅταν, is very rare. . . . It may have been characteristic of Lesbian, cf. Sappho 16.4 ὄττω τις ἔρᾱται, without κε, 98.3.'

[24] Although R. O. Evans, 'Remarks on Sappho's "Phainetai moi" ', *Studium Generale* 22 (1969), 1016–25, is prepared to accept this sense: 'The poet now relates the intensity of the emotional reaction of the speaker to the sight of the lovers in conversation. . . . The description is of the intensity of emotional reaction of the voyeur (or perhaps the eavesdropper) . . . a lyric which deals with the fierce fire of sexual passion, brought about by observation of a youth and a girl in discourse. The poem is about lust of the eye (and ear) . . .'

[25] Most (n. 1) argues that εἰσίδω is a better supplement than ἔς σ' ἴδω on palaeographical grounds, but that is hardly the case. The text of cod. P is σἴδω, indicating that the scribe assumed elision of σε before ἴδω, rather than shortening ἐσίδω by prodelision. The form ἐσίδω is metrically impossible, so that if this compound verb was in Sappho's text it must have been in the

Retaining ἔς σ', then, line 7 seems designed to state more precisely the parallel between the man's god-like status in behaving as he does, and Sappho's abject helplessness when confronted with so much as a glimpse of the girl. 'That man' can sit opposite the girl, listening attentively (ὑπακούει) to her pleasant voice and appreciating her seductive laughter, while Sappho on her part almost swoons at so much as a glimpse of the same lovely object. The man is 'godlike' because he does *not* succumb to the girl's charms even when exposed to their full force at such close proximity. This matches Bremer's interpretation of these lines, which he gives without further discussion: 'he seems to me godlike (and thus, by implication, more than human) as he is sitting there quietly sustaining your sweet presence for a while—I myself am unable to sustain it even for a moment and seem to myself on the brink of death'.[26] Although Sappho does not say in so many words that the man does not experience a comparable torment of love when sitting listening to the girl, one is entitled to deduce that much. Most telling is the verb ὑπακούει, 'listen attentively', 'obediently', even. Moreover, one feels, the girl would not be talking sweetly and laughing seductively if her partner in conversation was suffering the agonies of self-consciousness or erotic stupor that Sappho describes in herself. In the man we have the picture of the perfect recipient of the girl's charming conversation; he is her ideal one-man audience, sitting there opposite her, appreciating her qualities without showing outward signs of distress.[27]

In this way, the opening stanza can be seen to be a foil, or single-element priamel, to the poem as a whole (as it has come down to us). τό in line 5 is equivalent to Bundy's 'pronominal cap' in priamel structure, as it sums up the foil before stating its relevance to the main focus of the poet (in this case Sappho's reaction to the girl). The fact that the man is said to be 'godlike' because of his ability to retain his 'cool' is a rhetorical device serving to heighten the listener's awareness of the girl's beauty and make him sympathize with Sappho's succumbing to it. 'Only a god' would *not* fall helplessly in love with the girl, to use the epic expression mentioned above.

On this view, there is no question of Sappho feeling jealous of the foil she introduces merely to underline her own predicament: the man is real in the situation described by Sappho but he fulfils a purely formal function.[28] There is no love-triangle causing agonies of rivalry and jealousy; Sappho is using traditional language when she, exaggeratedly, says, 'that man seems a god who can sit close to you—a thing which

form εἰσίδω, and the scribe, if he mistakenly wrote this as σἴδω, committed a number of palaeographically untypical errors.

[26] J. M. Bremer, 'A reaction to Tsagarakis' discussion of Sappho fr. 31', *RhM* 125 (1982), 113–16, at 114. I also thank Prof. Bremer for referring me (in conversation) to S. L. Radt's note on the same problem in 'Sapphica', *Mnem* 23 (1970), 340–3. Radt writes (340–1) 'Der Mann dient als Kontrast zu Sappho; seine Ruhe bei dem *tête-à-tête* mit dem Mädchen—und nicht Sapphos Eifersucht—bildet den Anlass zu dem Gedicht; diese Ruhe stellt Sappho den Sturm der Erregung gegenüber, die sie selber in der gleichen Situation ergreifen würde. Der Mann bildet so die Folie für das, worum es Sappho eigentlich geht.'

[27] Cf. Bremer (n. 26), 115: 'The crucial point of lines 1–5 of Sappho's poem is not "the man's presence and its effect upon the girl", as Tsagarakis put it, but the effect of the girl's sweet talk and laughter upon the man, how he ἰσοδάνει and ὑπακούει.'

[28] Winkler (n. 4), 179, is close to this position: 'The anonymous "that man whosoever" . . . is a rhetorical cliché, not an actor in the imagined scene. Interpretations which *focus* on "that someone (male)" as a bridegroom (or suitor or friend) who is actually present and occupying the attention of the addressee miss the strategy of persuasion which informs the poem and in doing so reveal their own androcentric premises. In depicting "the man" as a concrete person central to the scene and god-like in power, such interpretations misread a figure of speech as a literal statement . . .' His own interpretation, however, relies too heavily, in my opinion, on comparison of the Sappho poem with Odysseus' speech to Nausicaa in the *Odyssey*.

reduces me to jelly'. Nor is the man said to be 'as fortunate as the gods'[29] because he enjoys a position temporarily denied Sappho. One might almost say: Sappho would not care to be in his position, as that, presumably, would precipitate even more drastic symptoms of discomfort than those which 'a mere glimpse' causes.

Having established this, however, one becomes aware of a further nuance in the relation of opening stanza (priamel or foil) to the rest of the poem. While the main poem is an almost abject listing of unpleasant physical symptoms arising from love for the girl,[30] the priamel establishes an ironical note which saves the whole poem from wallowing in its preoccupation with the self in turmoil. For, despite her self-confessed helplessness when confronted with the girl's beauty, the poet has the presence of mind in the beginning to set up a comparison with another, stronger, individual in epic terms. 'Godlike' in epic was the typical label for a brave warrior, one so endowed with physical strength and valour that he could fight like an Apollo or Athena or Ares. The man can remain seated ἐνάντιος, 'face to face' with the girl, like a hero facing up to an opponent, while Sappho's pulse races panic-stricken (καρδίαν ἐπτόαισεν). By transferring the standards of epic valour to the subject of love, Sappho creates an ironical effect: the man has heroic stature because he can stand her girlfriend's beauty when close up.[31] And this irony, which involves the listener seeing the man sitting next to the girl as a mock hero, is an essential springboard to the sudden 'confessional' tone of the rest of the poem. If Sappho had only listed her physical symptoms of passion, the listener might well have yawned, tut-tutted, and thought: 'poor thing!' But when introduced by this almost playful comparison with a mock hero who can withstand the onslaught of the girl's beauty,[32] the sudden launching into a description of Sappho's naked emotions and physical incapacitation has an almost overwhelming sincerity.[33] It is as if the priamel encapsulates a tradition of praise-poetry which Sappho then dismisses in order to say: my reactions to the girl's beauty are of a quite different sort. I am physically incapacitated by my feelings. Gentility stops here.

If my interpretation of the Sappho poem is accepted, it shows how a formal compositional element—immediately comprehensible, no doubt, to Sappho's listeners—has caused considerable trouble in later readings of the poems. Even Catullus may have taken the poem as a paradigm of jealous love, or he may have deliberately refashioned the original to suit his own purposes. The clear difference between Catullus' situation in his poem and Sappho's in hers is that Catullus is a man observing another man enjoying the company of *his* beloved Lesbia. The orientation of the sexes in Sappho's poem is different because rivalry between the 'man' and Sappho as suitors for the same girl involves asymmetry. Their suits, one feels, must

[29] For example, Page (n. 2), 19.

[30] [Longinus] ibid.: ὡς ἀλλότρια διοιχόμενα, perhaps 'as if they were somebody else's sufferings', διοίχομαι in the sense 'fall apart, fail, die'. W. Rhys Roberts translates 'as though they were all alien from herself and dispersed'.

[31] The same ironical contrast between the world of epic valour and (sympotic) love comes out in fr. 16 where Sappho asserts that the object of one's love is the finest thing, not military pomp and splendour, as some think. Marcovich (n. 23), 23, quoting epic ἰσόθεος φῶς δαίμονι ἴσος, recognizes that 'This "heroic" meaning is the most likely for Sappho's ἴσος θέοισι', but does not see the irony.

[32] Cf. Marcovich (n. 2), 25: 'Sappho draws the playful conclusion that the man must possess some superhuman strength . . .'

[33] Cf. Race (n. 12), 41–2: 'their (sc. priamels') common goal is to make the *hic et nunc* more striking by prefacing it with other instances, thereby providing a context for an otherwise flat assertion or naked particular . . . It is obvious that the priamel provides a measure of intensity that the bare statement of fact would otherwise lack.'

somehow be different in the girl's eyes. Hence Catullus' poem invites interpretation along the lines of jealous love, whereas, as I have argued, jealousy need play no part in Sappho's.

In her poem Sappho is, in my opinion, dramatizing the effect of a loved girl's beauty on herself. The emotions she experiences are not pleasant, but they serve to highlight both Sappho's sensitivity and the intensity of her passion. She is the opposite of the cricket in one of the *Carmina Anacreontea* (no. 34 West) who, in lines 17–18, is extolled as ἀπαθής, ἀναιμόσαρκε· σχεδὸν εἶ θεοῖς ὅμοιος: 'nerveless, bloodless, why, you're almost like a god!' The man in Sappho's poem who is at ease with the unnamed girl's beauty is like a god in his imperturbability in comparison with Sappho.

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