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SABINUS, THE *HEROIDES* AND THE POET-NIGHTINGALE. SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE *EPISTULA SAPPHUS**

Of all the works attributed to Ovid but of disputed authenticity, the epistle of Sappho to Phaon is notoriously the one which has most perplexed scholars. Most philologists at the end of the 19th century asserted the Ovidian paternity of the epistle; but in recent years the discussion has flared up once again, especially following an important contribution, tending in the opposite direction, by R. J. Tarrant,[1] and today, above all in Anglo-American studies, the pendulum seems to be swinging more in the direction of inauthenticity, according to the movement typical in debates of this kind.[2] The present article obviously does not intend to discuss the whole question once again nor to reaffirm *tout court* the attribution to Ovid, but brings to the attention of scholars certain arguments which should not be neglected in the discussion (and which point in the direction of authenticity).[3] I do not mean to underestimate the linguistic, stylistic, and metrical anomalies which scholars up to Tarrant and beyond have imputed to the *epistula Sapphus*, but rather to indicate some characteristics, above all of compositional technique, which have not been considered but which I think have a not insignificant weight in the debate on authenticity.

I

Any discussion of the authenticity of the *epistula Sapphus* and of the other *heroides* must necessarily start out from the famous catalogue contained in elegy 2.18 of the *amores*, which constitutes the most important testimony of Ovid himself on this matter.[4] This testimony, moreover, in informing us of the clever idea on the part of

* I am very grateful for their criticisms, suggestions and improvements to G. W. Most (who also prepared the English translation), L. E. Rossi, M. Labate, G. B. d'Alessio, the anonymous referee and the editor of this journal. Besides, I have taken great advantage from discussion of the present paper during seminars held at the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa and at the Universities of Roma 'La Sapienza' and of Palermo.

[1] 'The Authenticity of the Letter of Sappho to Phaon (Heroides 15)', *HSPh* 85 (1981), 133–53.

[2] Besides Tarrant and Murgia (n. 3), this position is shared by e.g. E. J. Kenney, *Philologus* 111 (1967), 213 n. 2 and *CQ* 29 (1979), 430 n. 124; P. E. Knox, *HSPh* 90 (1986), 207–8; J. C. McKeown, *Ovid: Amores. Text, Prolegomena and Commentary*. Vol. I. *Text and Prolegomena* (Leeds, 1987), 86 n. 32. Less clear are the positions of S. Hinds (n. 7), 44, and of A. Barchiesi (*Aevum[ant]* 5 [1992], 236 n. 37, but cf. *P. Ovidii Nasonis Epistulae heroidum 1–3* [Florence, 1992], 52 n. 2).

[3] The recent article by E. Courtney, 'Ovid and an epigram of Philodemus', *LCM* 15 (1990), 117–18, also moves in this direction: he intends to deny the claim of C. E. Murgia, 'Imitation and Authenticity in Ovid: *Metamorphoses* 1.477 and *Heroides* 15', *AJPh* 106 (1985), 471, that in the *epistula Sapphus* 'not a single line shows internal evidence of earliness' with respect to the *amores* and to Ovid's other erotic works.

[4] It is upon this catalogue that depend both the hypotheses concerning the dating of the *heroides* (this issue is still quite controversial) and those relating to their very physiognomy and dimensions. As is well known, a restrictive interpretation of Ovid's testimony (which goes back to Lachmann but has continued to enjoy a certain favour ever since and still finds adherents) limits the number of epistles to be attributed to Ovid to only the nine (or, if Sappho's is excluded, to the eight) which he lists (unless one adds to them, as a substitute for the epistle of Sappho, that of Briseis: so Tarrant [n. 1], 152). With regard to the dating (full discussion in H. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides* [Princeton, 1974], pp. 300–18; J. C. McKeown, pp. 86–8; see too the clarification

Sabinus,[5] the friend who replies to the heroines' letters in the name of their respective lovers or husbands, also informs us of the circumstance which suggested to Ovid the idea of the supplement of paired epistles he composed several years later. Here is Ovid's text:

> quod licet, aut artes teneri profitemur Amoris
> (ei mihi, praeceptis urgeor ipse meis),
> aut quod Penelopes verbis reddatur Ulixi
> scribimus et lacrimas, Phylli relicta, tuas,
> quod Paris et Macareus et quod male gratus Iason
> Hippolytique parens Hippolytusque legant,
> quodque tenens strictum Dido miserabilis ensem
> dicat et †Aoniae Lesbis amata lyrae†.
> quam cito de toto rediit meus orbe Sabinus
> scriptaque diversis rettulit ille locis!
> candida Penelope signum cognovit Ulixis,
> legit ab Hippolyto scripta noverca suo;
> iam pius Aeneas miserae rescripsit Elissae,
> quodque legat Phyllis, si modo vivit, adest.
> tristis ad Hypsipylen ab Iasone littera venit,
> dat votam Phoebo Lesbis amata lyram. (*am.* 2.18.19–34)[6]

of M. Citroni, *Poesia e lettori in Roma antica* [Bari, 1995], pp. 467–8 nn. 22 and 24, pp. 470–1 n. 32), I shall limit myself here to pointing out the argument proposed again most recently by A. Primmer ('Datierungs- und Entwicklungsfragen bei Vergil und Ovid', *WS* 16 [1982], esp. 254ff.), but in fact already hinted at by W. Kraus, in *Ovid*, M. v. Albrecht and E. Zinn (eds.), (Darmstadt, 1968), p. 83 n. 11 (revised version of the article *Ovidius* in the *RE*). This argument (apparently not taken account of by either McKeown or Hinds [n. 7] or C. E. Murgia, 'The Date of Ovid's *Ars amatoria* 3', *AJPh* 107 [1986], 74–94), which seems to me decisive for interpreting *am.* 2.18.19 as referring to the *ars amatoria* and hence for assigning the elegy to the second edition of the *amores*, points out that v. 20 (cf. below) must be alluding to the third book of the *ars*, the one Ovid wrote for the benefit of women (this is the motif of *ars* 3.590 *nec dubito telis quin petar ipse meis*; Murgia 91 n. 28 takes it instead to refer generally to *amores*, *ars* and *heroides*). No serious objection to this interpretation, which dates the third book of the *ars* before the second, three-book edition of the *amores*, is provided by the famous and much tormented verse *ars* 3.343, which—according to a controversial reading but one accepted in various modern editions (*deve tribus libris*)—would in fact presuppose the three-book edition of the *amores*: first of all because there are very good reasons to read, with the *Hamiltonensis*, *deve tener* (so now, after E. Pianezzola in his ed. of the *ars* [Milan, 1991], Kenney too in the *OCT*^{2}); and furthermore because one cannot exclude, at the limit, the possibility that the second edition of the *amores* and that of the *ars* (including the third book) were being prepared simultaneously (cf. also Citroni 470 n. 32).

[5] H. Bardon, *La littérature latine inconnue* (Paris, 1956), ii. 60–61 is entirely misleading on Sabinus: it is obviously false to assert that Ovid attributes to him only a letter of Ulysses to Penelope (the reference is to *Pont.* 4.16.13–14, whereas the more important testimony, *am.* 2.18, is ignored) and that it is up to us 'd'imaginer tout le recueil, avec les épîtres de Jason, de Protésilas, de Paris, d'Hercule, et avec les responses de leurs amantes' (Bardon evidently supposes that Sabinus wrote first letters from the heroes to their women and then letters of reply on the part of the latter). Likewise without foundation is the hypothesis of Della Corte ('L'annunzio delle *Heroides*', *GIF* n.s. 3 [1972], 315 [= *Opuscula*, vol. XI (Genua, 1988), p. 102]) 'che, via via che Ovidio scriveva una lettera delle *heroides*, e la mandava a Sabino, questi, che stava allora compiendo un viaggio per tutto il Mediterraneo, provvedesse a prepararne la risposta (vv. 27–8)' (cf. also 316); far more plausible is the interpretation of the two verses as witty, as a literary circle's joke, proposed by C. Neumeister, *A&A* 28 (1982), 100.

[6] The text is that of Kenney's edition (cf. also n. 12 below). Tarrant's hypothesis that verses 26 and 34 are both fruits of an interpolation designed to justify the illegitimate penetration of the *epistula Sapphus* (according to Tarrant, a product of the Neronian or Flavian era) into the corpus of the *heroides* is too contrived to seem credible. The very implausibility of such a theory induces other scholars, convinced as they are of the epistle's spuriousness, to prefer the hypothesis that an original, genuinely Ovidian epistle of Sappho (accepting the evidentiary value of *am.* 2.18) was replaced by the transmitted *epistula Sapphus*: along these lines cf. most recently

We shall not discuss once again the problems of which Ovidian epistles are listed here, and how many, and whether Ovid's authorship should be limited to these alone and thereby excluded for all the epistles of the first series as we have it which are left unmentioned here. Recently S. Hinds has returned to this question in relation to the epistle of Medea, but with considerations of a general character.[7] With effective arguments, he refutes the claim that Ovid was obliged to provide a complete list of the epistles of the *liber*, like the table of contents at the end of a volume: it is 'simply perverse to expect comprehensiveness' in an Alexandrian poetic catalogue (which is not a shopping list), whereas it is reasonable to expect concision, asymmetry, allusive hints.

Here what interest us instead is Sabinus' clever idea of the replies, of an epistolary exchange. Just as the catalogue of 2.18.21–6 lacks some of the epistles Ovid actually wrote, so too that of vv. 29–34, which indicates Sabinus' letters in reply (Ulysses, Hippolytus, Aeneas, Demophoon, Jason, Phaon) is incomplete when set beside the catalogue of vv. 21–26.[8] Not much can be inferred from Ovid's words concerning the nature of the letters of reply; but one can deduce that the replies of Aeneas to Dido and of Jason to Hypsipyle were negative, i.e. they remained deaf to the appeals of the two women. Aeneas' refusal can be argued on the basis of the epithet that characterizes him, *pius*, in opposition to the one that qualifies Dido, *misera*—an antithesis that contrasts the motives of family duties with those of the love that moved the Virgilian and Ovidian heroine.[9] Jason's refusal of Hypsipyle is expressed even more clearly by the epithet *tristis* in the letter (33), which probably announces the reason that motivates him: the connection which by now unites the hero with Medea.[10] The tenor of Demophoon's reply is more uncertain (*si modo vivit* suggests that it may have reached the suicidal woman too late);[11] while Phaon's reply to

Murgia (n. 3), 471–2, and J. Booth, *Ovid. The Second Book of Amores* (Warminster, 1991), p. 189. Against this 'rather unlikely set of coincidences', cf. already Jacobson [n. 4], p. 278.

[7] 'Medea in Ovid: Scenes from the Life of an Intertextual Heroine', *MD* 30 (1993), 9–47, esp. 31–4.

[8] The point is well put by G. P. Goold, *HSPh* 69 (1965), 43: 'the fact that Penelope's mail is mentioned first and Sappho's last I interpret as a poet's intimation that replies were sent to all. But Ovid has tastefully not repeated the whole list and, equally tastefully, has varied the order' (but cf. already F. Jacoby, *RhM* 60 [1905], 71 n. 2). The only other reference to Sabinus, in *Pont.* 4.16.13–14 (*et qui Penelopae rescribere iussit Ulixem / errantem saevo per duo lustra mari*), is significant in this sense: here the allusion solely to Ulysses' epistle (the reply to the very first epistle, Penelope's) is enough to indicate the whole collection. If we lacked *am.* 2.18.29–34, who would not believe that that was the only letter Sabinus wrote?

[9] Cf. the opposition *miserae / crudelis* in the last distich of the epistle of Sappho.

[10] The claim that 23 refers to Hypsipyle's epistle (on the basis of 33, i.e. the explicit mention of a letter of reply to her) is refuted by Hinds (n. 7) 32–3. Certainly *male gratus* of 23 is a significant hint, and hence either refers to the epistle of Medea, as Hinds suggests, or, one might perhaps suggest as a second possibility, comprises both letters, that of Hypsipyle as well as that of Medea, indicating in Jason's ingratitude his tendency towards 'recidivism' (the parallelism of the two episodes which the sixth epistle so much insists upon). On the other hand, with regard to the list of Sabinus' letters, if the reasons of poetic economy proper to an Alexandrian catalogue illustrated by Hinds suggested that only one reply of Jason's could be cited, this could only be the one to Hypsipyle, the first of the two women, abandoned for the second one: combining the effect with the cause, the mention of a single woman could designate both. An analogous taste for parallelism (Jason's recidivism as the 'family destiny' which links Theseus and his son: on this motif, but in relation to another son, Demophoon, cf. also n. 24) can be recognized in v. 24 *Hippolytique parens Hippolytusque...*

[11] According to J. Booth, *si modo vivit* (v. 32) 'perhaps also reflects Demophoon's anxiety and renewed promise of return' (p. 189 ad loc.; cf. also p. 86). It cannot be excluded that Demophoon might have tried to oppose Phyllis' suicidal plans, but in any case his reply could not have modified the course of events.

Sappho must have been positive, since the latter, as *amata*, consecrates her lyre to Phoebus.[12]

The word *votam* (34), as is well known,[13] refers to vv. 181ff. of the *epistula Sapphus*—where, to be sure, the poetess promised to dedicate her lyre to Apollo not if Phaon loved her in turn but if she escaped unharmed from her leap from the cliff: this was the *remedium* which, according to the oracle of the god, would free her from her passion (as had once happened to Deucalion, *Pyrrhae succensus amore*, 167). If Phaon's reply (by Sabinus' hand) induced Sappho to fulfil her vow, then evidently it was such as to free her from the pains of love: indeed, Sappho obtained more than she had hoped for, she even obtained the reciprocation of her love by Phaon.[14] In any case, Phaon's reply prevented the heroine's suicide and kept her alive, contradicting the legend[15] and—apparently in this case alone (at least to judge on the basis of the epistles mentioned)—altering the destiny that awaits Ovid's heroines.[16] Naturally, this is not a good reason for doubting the genuineness of the text of *am.* 2.18.[17]

Moreover, the generally witty, provocative character of Sabinus' ploy is evident, above all in the very notion of writing replies to letters which do not envision them.[18]

[12] An evident superposition of v. 34 upon 26 seems to have produced the corruption in this latter. Like Kenney, F. Munari (Florence, 1951) too recurs to *cruces*, but excludes from them *Aoniae Lesbis*, limiting the corruption to the last two words. I too believe that, even if the origin of the corruption seems evident, this is no reason to exclude the possibility that there really was a partial coincidence between the two verses (which could have facilitated the corruption), so as to mark in parallel, perhaps precisely with the mention of the lyre, the close of the two catalogues, and that the corruption (it has most obviously affected *amata*, which is meaningless here, and, precisely because of the very mode of the corruption, offers no hope of conjectural restoration) might therefore be more limited than the sequence *Aoniae... lyrae* (cf. now also Booth ad loc.). The variant *amica* is not convincing (cf. e.g. Tarrant [n. 1], 151, and Booth), though it is accepted by Goold (who nonetheless in his revision of the Loeb edition [Cambridge, MA and London, 1977] leaves in 26 the text of Showerman, *et Aoniae Lesbis amata lyrae*) and most recently by McKeown too.

[13] This observation is attributed to Loers (1829) by Jacobson (n. 4), p. 278, but it is already found in Domizio Calderini's introduction to his commentary on the epistle (1475).

[14] On the intense discussion about the relation between the meaning of *am.* 2.18.34 and that of vv. 181ff. of the *epistula Sapphus*, cf. the bibliography supplied by H. Dörrie, *P. Ovidius Naso. Der Brief der Sappho an Phaon* (Munich, 1975), p. 187 n. 1 (add D. Comparetti, *Sull'autenticità dell'epistola ovidiana di Saffo a Faone* [Florence, 1876], pp. 15–18 and 30, whose interpretation, however, is based in vv. 169–70 upon a minority reading, *tetigit lentissima Pyrrhae / pectora*, which presupposes that the woman loved by Deucalion fell in love with him in her turn).

[15] 'Denn daß Sappho nicht mit Phaon glücklich wurde, das war in der Überlieferung fest verankert': Dörrie [n. 14], p. 189.

[16] Cf. Dörrie [n. 14], p. 188: 'Keiner der übrigen Sabinus-Briefe bringt eine Wende in der Situation der Heroinen'. As we have seen, some degree of uncertainty may remain in the case of Demophoon's reply to Phyllis; but it seems certain anyway that, regardless of this latter (whether it was negative or arrived too late), the destiny of death which the myth regularly assigns to the heroine was not modified in the end: cf. A. Barchiesi, 'Narratività e convenzione nelle Heroides', *MD* 19 (1987), 63 n. 1 (repr. as introd. to A.B., *P. Ovidii Nasonis Epistulae heroidum 1–3* cit.): 'al v. 32 [...] sembra di cogliere una giocosa riserva di Ovidio, basata proprio sulla stretta scansione temporale che è tipica delle epistole 1–15: la situazione in cui Fillide scrive non lascia tempo per una risposta'. In any case, here too Ovid is presupposing familiarity with the *heroides* on the part of the reader of the catalogue (and hence not only at v. 34, as maintained by Tarrant [n. 1], 150, who uses this as a further argument to declare it an interpolation).

[17] As proposed by Dörrie [n. 14], pp. 189–90, who therefore hypothesizes, in contradiction to what is generally thought, a corruption produced by the superposition of v. 26 upon 34 (and suggests that *amata* is a gloss which has penetrated mistakenly into the text; but this hypothesis is hardly credible, because the glossator would demonstrate himself to be scarcely familiar with the text he recalls).

[18] The point is well put especially by A. Barchiesi (n. 16): 'l'iniziativa dell'amico Sabino [...] può aver avuto il carattere scherzoso di una violazione intenzionale, un po' da guastafeste

As has been observed more than once, the epistles of the first series are perfectly autonomous: they have no need of supplements, they do not ask for a reply, indeed they explicitly reject the idea. In a position of programmatic importance, in the pentameter of the first distich of the entire collection, Penelope writes to Ulysses: *nil mihi rescribas attinet: ipse veni* (1.2). In only one case in the whole first series of epistles does a heroine complain that she has not received a letter informing her about the situation of the man she loves: Hypsipyle has had to find out news about Jason from *fama*, from the voice of others (*quamlibet adverso signatur epistula vento. / Hypsipyle missa digna salute fui. / cur mihi fama prior quam littera nuntia venit?*, 6.7–9); but her complaint refers to the past, when Jason should have told her about the trials he had undergone for the sake of the golden fleece, and is not a request that he send her a letter *now* in reply to the one she is sending him.

On the other hand, there is one other passage of great importance in this connection: it does not seem to have been observed[19] that, if we accept the authenticity of the epistle of Sappho—and if we accept, for the moment, that it was the last of the first series[20]—we find in the very last distich of that epistle (219–20), at the very end of the collection, a request that Phaon send a letter of reply. Sappho offers him alternatives: either to return to her as soon as possible, trusting in Venus' help for the voyage; or to abandon her, but in that case not without writing her a letter telling her the cruel news (and thereby supplying the premise for her suicide):

> sive iuvat longe fugisse Pelasgida Sappho
> —nec tamen invenies, cur ego digna fugi—
> hoc saltem miserae crudelis epistula dicat,
> ut mihi Leucadia fata petantur aqua! (217–20)

In other words: at the very end of the whole epistolary collection we read an invitation contrary to the one formulated by Penelope at the opposite limit of the work, in a perfectly symmetrical position, second and penultimate verse. Whatever Ovid's own intentions were (whether or not we wish to see here a hint of the development he went on to give the *heroides* some years later), the hypothesis foreseen at the end of the final epistle of the collection takes on an evident importance in the light of Sabinus' initiative: Sabinus seems to have derived his inspiration from Ovid himself, taking Sappho's request literally (the *quam cito* of *am.* 2.18.27 alluding jokingly to this quick-witted cleverness) and setting in motion the mechanism which led in the end to the *Briefpaare*.[21] In other words, we can understand Sabinus' move

(comunque in spirito ovidiano, data la passione di Ovidio per il disvelare tongue-in-cheek le convenzioni letterarie e la loro arbitrarietà)' (an allusion to Sabinus' witty distortion of Ovid's intention can also be detected in the *iussit* of *Pont.* 4.16.13, cf. n. 8).

[19] There is merely a hint in this sense in Jacobson (n. 4), p. 335, and, as I now see, in K. Heldmann, 'Ovids Sabinus-Gedicht (*Am.* 2, 18) und die *Epistulae Heroidum*', *Hermes* 122 (1994), 188–219, at 198, who moves, however, in a direction different from my own, and in any case is not concerned with the authenticity of the epistle of Sappho (on which 211 n. 78).

[20] In fact it must not be forgotten that the position of the *epistula Sapphus* concluding the first cycle of epistles is a conjecture of Daniel Heinsius (1629) based precisely upon the catalogue of *am.* 2.18; hence the danger of a circular argument is apparent (but a piece of evidence for such a collocation already in the 15th century is pointed out by M. Pulbrook, 'The original published form of Ovid's *Heroides*', *Hermathena* 122 [1977], 29–45, at 44 n. 24). We shall return to this issue below (n. 22).

[21] The witty, provocative character of Sabinus' ploy probably explains another fact as well. In Sappho's last words, Ovid had posed an alternative between return and desertion (this latter to be communicated with a farewell letter); Sabinus does indeed have Phaon write a letter to Sappho, but so as to announce to her his return, thereby jumbling the alternatives. To be sure,

much better if we agree that this was in fact the end of the work, that the epistle of Sappho, culminating in the 'provocation' picked up by Sabinus, concluded Ovid's *heroides*.[22]

II

nunc tibi Sicelides veniunt nova praeda puellae:
quid mihi cum Lesbo? Sicelis esse volo.
o vos erronem tellure remittite vestra,
Nisiades matres Nisiadesque nurus,
nec vos decipiant blandae mendacia linguae!
quae vobis dicit, dixerat ante mihi. (*epist. Sapph.* 51-6)

Sappho imagines Phaon's new love adventures in Sicily; she laments that she is far away from the island and warns the Sicilian women against his seductive lies. One element in these verses challenges the understanding of the interpreters: *Nisiades* '(Megarian?) is without parallel', observes Jacobson (p. 284), and the usual explanation ('Sicilian, from the Sicilian Megara, which, like its metropolis, may have vaunted its connexion with King Nisus of the purple lock, from whose name Nisaea, the harbour of Megara, was supposed to be derived', Palmer) does not in fact explain the epithet's allusive richness.

The appeal to Nisus' descendants is not an ostentation of mythological erudition, recherché but inert:[23] it recalls the episode to which Nisus' name is universally linked,

I am not unaware that this 'violation' of the base-text has not only prompted suspicions concerning the text of *am.* 2.18.34 (cf. above n. 17), but can also nourish doubts concerning just what epistle (one different from the transmitted *epistula Sapphus*?) Sabinus was replying to.

[22] As was pointed out above, the location of the *epistula Sapphus* concluding the first series in modern editions of the *heroides* is conjectural. But that conjecture, based upon the correct observation that in both catalogues of *am.* 2.18 the same epistles, Penelope's and Sappho's, occupy—probably not by chance—the extreme positions and thereby indicate the limits of the work, can on my view count upon another good argument too, besides finding corroboration (*pace* Tarrant [n. 1], 148) in the *Florilegium Gallicum*, which transmits its *excerpta* in an intermediate position between those of Hypermnestra's letter and Paris'. The exquisitely poetological character of Sappho's epistle (for good reason, hers is the only voice of the *heroides* endowed by so marked a literary consciousness, as we shall see again in the final pages of this article) authorizes the hypothesis that it must have had a prominent location, such as the final one, so as to be able to construe the whole work in an elegiac perspective, writing its poetics and offering an authorized interpretation for it. It is quite evident that, for a poet as concerned as Ovid was to indicate the borders of texts, Sappho was an ideal figure with whom to conclude his work—just like, at the opposite end, Penelope, the woman of waiting, the very emblem of the woman far from her husband (in his turn, *lentus* par excellence, cf. 1.1). On the contrary, it would be difficult to assign an analogously significant function to Hypermnestra (the final epistle according to the manuscript tradition). True, the final distich of her epistle (*scribere plura libet, sed pondere lassa catenae / est manus et vires subtrahit ipse timor*, 131-2) can lend itself to being read symbolically (on the motif of fatigue in epistolary conclusions cf. E.-A. Kirfel, *Untersuchungen zur Briefform der Heroides Ovids* [Bern-Stuttgart, 1969], pp. 79-80), but this seems more pertinently motivated by the features which distinguish this particular character (Hypermnestra is lamenting an unjustly inflicted punishment—cf. *catena*—and is terrorized by a violent paternal figure). Another argument against such a hypothesis is the anomaly of a collection of 14 epistles, given that it is well known that «within individual *libelli* the Augustan poets cultivated structures based on multiples of five» (E. J. Kenney, *Apuleius. Cupid & Psyche* [Cambridge, 1990], p. 3). In this sense it is hardly accidental that the catalogue of epistles which Ovid lists at *am.* 2.18 (nine of his own and six of Sabinus') adds up to fifteen (Tarrant's hypothesis [n. 1], 152 n. 39, that a single edition comprises the nine Ovidian epistles indicated in the catalogue of the *am.* and Sabinus' six responses, is not persuasive).

[23] 'ein wenig preziös', as Dörrie puts it ([n. 14], pp. 107-8 and n. 29). He feels the need to defend Ovid for his use of so unusual a term against possible accusations of a taste for enigmas and appeals to the clarity of the context, which leaves no doubt about the reference to Sicily.

his daughter Scylla's catastrophic love for Minos, a foreigner like Phaon, whose insidious falsehoods the descendants of Nisus would do well to guard against. The women of Sicily are being offered, as a warning against the fascination of the handsome stranger, seducer and betrayer, one of the classical paradigms of this situation, and one which (unlike, for example, Jason or Theseus, the other two mythic characters most linked to this scheme) belongs to their very own 'national history'.[24] This is what Ovid's Medea herself is thinking of, precisely in relation to Jason, when she laments that Scylla, the marine monster who terrifies sailors,[25] did not destroy their ship during its voyage in flight from Colchis (*aut nos Scylla rapax canibus misisset edendos—/ debuit ingratis Scylla nocere viris*, 12.123–4) so as to punish Jason, who was getting ready to replicate the role of *vir ingratus*.[26] Hence the use of this epithet is sophisticated and refined: it is anything but banal, is motivated by the context, and is intimately relevant to the mythic scheme underlying the text (the negative model of betrayal of one's country for love of a foreigner).[27] Only with difficulty could it be attributed to a forger.

III

Desperate at being abandoned, Sappho goes to the places which saw her happiness with Phaon: she recognizes the grove, the grass on which they lay together and upon which she now pours her tears. Nature shows its sympathy with Sappho's sufferings:

> quin etiam rami positis lugere videntur
> frondibus, et nullae dulce queruntur aves.
> sola virum non ulta pie maestissima mater
> concinit Ismarium Daulias ales Ityn.
> ales Ityn, Sappho desertos cantat amores—
> hactenus, ut media cetera nocte silent. (151–6)

The absence of the song of birds is one expression of nature's *Mitempfindung* with the protagonist's fate. The only exception to the general silence is the mournful song of the nightingale,[28] whose lament for the loss of her son is assimilated to Sappho's lament for the loss of Phaon.[29] The situation displays striking analogies with that of

[24] Exactly as Theseus himself (associated with his son Demophoon) is used in the *ars* as a paradigm of *deceptae ... crimen amantis* (3.454) whom the Athenian women should guard against (here too the exemplum is selected with a view towards the addressee, as belonging to the very same city): *parcite, Cecropides, iuranti credere Theseo: / quos faciet testis, fecit et ante, deos. / et tibi, Demophoon, Thesei criminis heres, / Phyllide decepta nulla relicta fides* (457–60).

[25] There is an evident contamination, here as in other passages in Ovid and in other Augustan poets (cf. R. O. A. M. Lyne in his commentary to the *Ciris* [Cambridge, 1978], on vv. 54–7; S. Timpanaro, *Nuovi contributi di filologia e storia della lingua latina* [Bologna, 1994], pp. 101ff.), between Scylla the daughter of Nisus and the homonymous nymph transformed by Circe into the marine monster girded at the waist by barking dogs.

[26] On this verse see now, after Hinds (n. 7), 15, also S. Casali, 'Ancora su Medea e Scilla (Ovidio, *Heroides* 12, 124)', *MD* 32 (1994), 173–4; further discussion in the forthcoming commentary by Federica Bessone on the epistle of Medea.

[27] Codified in elegy in passages like Prop. 4.4.39–40 (together with Ariadne) and 3.19.21–4 (where, analogously, the exemplum is accompanied by a warning to unmarried women: *at vos, innuptae, felicius urite taedas*, 25).

[28] A full collection of material on the nightingale is provided by A. Sauvage, *Étude de thèmes animaliers dans la poésie latine. Le cheval–Les oiseaux* (Bruxelles, 1975), pp. 192–206 (on its association with groves, pp. 193–5; on the *maestitia* of its song, esp. pp. 198–201 and 204–6); for the Greek sources, cf. above all R. Kannicht in his comm. to Eur. *Hel.* (Heidelberg, 1969), ii. 281ff. and A. W. Bulloch on Call. *Lav. Pall.* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 205–6.

[29] The difference in age between the very young Phaon and the more mature Sappho (of which there is no explicit trace in the epistle, but which seems to be presupposed in the references

another character in the *heroides*, Leander, who swims towards Hero in absolute silence, accompanied only by the mournful song of the halcyons:

> nullaque vox usquam, nullum veniebat ad aures
> praeter dimotae corpore murmur aquae.
> Alcyones solae, memores Ceycis amati,
> nescioquid visae sunt mihi dulce queri. (18.79–82)

The halcyons' song is a manifest omen of the fate of death by water that awaits Leander, the same fate that had befallen Ceyx and caused as a consequence the suicide of Halcyon (exactly as will be the case for Hero).[30] The two birds, traditionally associated as examples of mournful song,[31] become to a certain extent 'figures' of these two characters by virtue of the analogies which connect them—the recurrence of this same compositional mechanism in one epistle whose Ovidianness is no longer in general discussion[32] and in the epistle of Sappho is already significant in itself. What Sappho and the nightingale have in common—beyond the ancient, widespread metaphor that assimilates a poet to this bird[33] (and Sappho herself is defined as a nightingale in the famous passage from Hermesianax's *Leontion* on the poets' unhappy loves)[34]—is the *maestitia* of their song (for a grave emotional loss).

Now, it should be noted that when the author of the *epistula Sapphus* uses the song of the nightingale as emblematic of sadness, he recalls a celebrated passage in Catullus' poem 65, the poem which, by being prefixed to his translation of Callimachus' *Lock of Berenice*, unmistakably acquires not only an introductory function, but also a programmatic one.[35] Here the poet (like Homer's Penelope: *Od.* 19.518ff.) assimilates his own mournful poetry to the song of the nightingale:

> at certe semper amabo,
> semper *maesta* tua carmina morte canam,
> qualia sub densis ramorum *concinit* umbris
> *Daulias*, absumpti fata gemens Ityli. (65.11–4)[36]

to his extraordinary youth in vv. 21, 85, and esp. 93: *o nec adhuc iuvenis, nec iam puer*) might well sound slightly ironic in this connection (cf. also the assimilation of Sappho's pain to that of a mother at the funeral of her son in vv. 115–16).

[30] The analogies between the two myths have been pointed out more than once (e.g. M. Pohlenz, *Hermes* 48 [1913], 7ff.; H. Tränkle, *Hermes* 91 [1963], 465ff.), and explained with reference to the presumed Hellenistic epyllion which recounted the story of Hero and Leander and served as a model to Musaeus and the two Ovidian epistles, leaving conspicuous traces in other Latin literary texts (cf. recently T. D. Papanghelis, *Propertius: A Hellenistic Poet on Love and Death* [Cambridge, 1987], pp. 103ff.; further discussion in my forthcoming commentary on *heroides* 18 and 19).

[31] Cf. e.g. *AP* 9.262.5–6 [= Gow-Page, *GP* vv. 2831–2, with the note ad loc.], where a mother's lament for the death of her six children, three by disease and three at sea, is assimilated respectively to the nightingale's lament and the halcyon's; Prop. 3.10.9–10 *alcyonum positis requiescant ora querelis; / increpet absumptum nec sua mater Ityn* (here too the value of a dire omen is attributed to their song); Ov. *trist.* 5.1.60 *hic querulam Procnen Alcyonenque facit*; [Ov.] *epiced. Drus.* 105–8 (cf. n. 40); but cf. e.g. also Sen. *Agam.* 669ff. and 681ff.; [Sen.] *Oct.* 7–8; Stat. *silv.* 3.5.57ff., etc. Cf. also Sauvage (n. 28), pp. 198–9 and 283–4.

[32] The position of E. Courtney, *Hermathena* 119 (1975), 83 (and already *BICS* 12 [1965], 63–6), who thinks all the double epistles are spurious, seems isolated.

[33] The material is gathered by A. Steier, *RE* XIII.1864.42ff.

[34] Cf. 7.49 Powell.

[35] Cf. T. P. Wiseman, *Catullan Questions* (Leicester, 1969), pp. 17–18; most recently, F. Spoth, *Ovids Heroides als Elegien* (Munich, 1992), pp. 29–30 (esp. p. 30 n. 11 for the correspondences with the epistle of Sappho), and A. Barchiesi, 'Riflessivo e futuro. Due modi di allusione nella poesia, ellenistica e augustea', *Aevum(ant)* 5 (1992), 241.

[36] The reuse of Catullus (ignored in the comm. of Palmer and Dörrie; merely pointed out, but not evaluated, in that of S. G. De Vries [Berlin, 1888], p. 93; cf. also I. Cazzaniga, *La saga di Itis nella tradizione letteraria e mitografica greco-romana* [Varese-Milan, 1951], vol. i, p. 83) is rendered certain not only by *concinit* (cf. also *am.* 3.12.32 *concinit Odrysium Cecropis ales Ityn*)

Catullus, suffering pain for the loss of his brother, is no longer capable of turning to the Muses, as he once was. All he can compose is a particular kind of poetry: mournful poetry, i.e. elegy.[37] Sappho too, in a painful condition analogous to Catullus', can no longer write poetry as she was accustomed to, lyric poetry:

> nunc vellem facunda forem! dolor artibus obstat,
> ingeniumque meis substitit omne malis.
> non mihi respondent veteres in carmina vires;
> plectra dolore tacent, muta dolore lyra est, (195–8)

and Sappho too finds herself obliged to compose another kind of poetry, one connected to mourning and the expression of suffering:

> forsitan et quare mea sint alterna requiras
> carmina, cum lyricis sim magis apta modis.
> flendus amor meus est—elegi quoque flebile carmen;
> non facit ad lacrimas barbitos ulla meas. (5–8)

A poet who suffers cannot help but write elegy, sing 'like a nightingale', according to an association authorized by a famous epigram of Callimachus (*AP* 7.80 = 2 Pf., in memory of his friend Heraclitus, an elegiac poet).[38] Even if we set aside the fact that Sappho herself wrote about the song of the nightingale (cf. frg. 136 V.: it is a suggestive hypothesis that Ovid's Sappho found in Catullus, her most congenial Latin interpreter, what the Latin poet had perhaps derived from Sappho herself),[39] we certainly cannot help noticing the programmatic, poetological quality of the discourse of Ovid's character.[40]

but above all by the epithet *Daulias*, which Thucydides says was widespread in Greek poetry (*πολλοῖς δὲ καὶ τῶν ποιητῶν ἐν ἀηδόνος μνήμῃ Δαυλιὰς ἡ ὄρνις ἐπωνόμασται*), but which in Latin is never attested elsewhere before the *epistula Sapphus* and [Ov.] *epiced. Drus.* 106 (cf. n. 40); then cf. [Sen.] *Herc. Oet.* 192 *Daulias ales* and [Verg.] *Ciris* 199–200 *puellae / Dauliades* (a curious feature shared by numerous texts which are spurious or whose authenticity is at least suspect): cf. Lyne ad loc.; *Daulis* in Sen. *Thyest.* 275.

[37] According to an identification widespread above all in Roman poetry: indications in S. Hinds, *The Metamorphosis of Persephone. Ovid and the Self-conscious Muse* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 103–4. It should also be noted that the same Catullan poem contains the word *maeror* (15 *in tantis maeroribus*), which recurs in *epist. Sapph.* 117 but whose rarity in Augustan poetry (only in Hor. *ars* 110, then also in *epiced. Drus.* 294) has naturally provoked scholarly suspicions (Tarrant [n. 1], 140).

[38] For a full discussion of the epigram and the problems connected with it, cf., after Gow-Page, *HE* ii. 191–2, at least N. Hopkinson, *A Hellenistic Anthology* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 249, and now (with further bibliographical indications) R. Hunter, 'Callimachus and Heraclitus', *MD* 28 (1992), 113–23; on the echoes of the epigram in Ovid, cf. G. Williams, *CQ* 41 (1991), 169–77.

[39] I am thinking, for instance, of the fragment of Sappho (150 V.) on the incompatibility between *threnos* and the Muses (motivated by a death in the family, as Maximus of Tyre, who transmits the fragment, seems to attest), which suggests a certain analogy with the opening verses of Catullus' poem, on the pain that makes it impossible for the poet to venerate the Muses (*etsi me assiduo confectum cura dolore / sevocat a doctis, Ortale, virginibus, / nec potis est dulcis Musarum expromere fetus / mens animi*...). Another indication might come from Thucydides' report (cf. n. 36) of the diffusion in poetry of the epithet *Δαυλιάς* to designate the nightingale: in fact no secure attestation seems to survive in Greek (according to a hypothetical supplement by Pfeiffer, Callimachus may have used the epithet in frg. 113.2), while in Latin poetry, as was mentioned above, we have no occurrence before Catullus. For possible relations (in a different sense) between Sappho and Catullus 65, cf. P. A. Johnston, 'An Echo of Sappho in Catullus 65', *Latomus* 42 (1983), 388–94.

[40] The evident fact that *epist. Sapph.* 154 *Ismarium Daulias ales Ityn* and *epiced. Drus.* 106 *Threicium Daulias ales Ityn* cannot be entirely independent of one another raises the familiar and quite difficult question of the relation between the two texts (cf. e.g. Purser in Palmer, p. 421). If the hypothesis proposed here, that *epist. Sapph.* 153–4 is directly dependent upon Catullus 65.12–14, is accepted, then it seems likely to me that *epiced. Drus.* 105–8 *talis in umbrosis, mitis*

Sappho presents herself and her epistle as an elegy, indeed she explains why she cannot write anything but elegy. A careful analysis of the characteristics of certain citations of the canonic texts of this literary genre confirms the poet's intention of making Sappho's words a programmatic discourse about the typically elegiac connection between a choice of life and a choice of poetry. The citation of a verse like Prop. 2.1.4 *ingenium nobis ipsa puella facit* (love as the sole source of inspiration), for example, is symptomatic: formally it finds a precise echo in v. 84 *ingenium nobis molle*[41] *Thalia facit*; in meaning it has a clear correspondence to 206 *ingenio vires ille dat, ille negat* (Sappho's inspiration, like the elegiac poet's, has its sole source in the beloved). Or again, a distich like *epist. Sapph.* 79–80 *molle meum levibusque cor est violabile telis / et semper causa est, cur ego semper amem* has theoretical precedents in passages of rich programmatic density like Prop. 2.1.12 *invenio causas mille poeta novas* (the beloved woman as an inexhaustible source of inspiration), or 2.22.13–4 *quaeris, Demophoon, cur sim tam mollis in omnis? / quod quaeris, 'quare', non habet ullus amor*, and 17–8 *unicuique dedit vitium natura creato: / mi fortuna aliquid semper amare dedit* (the elegiac poet's natural, congenital propensity to *semper amare*, repeating the link of necessity with his choice of poetry).[42]

Sappho, the only one among the heroines of Ovid's work to be at the same time also a poetess, presents herself precisely as the elegiac poet-lover and her own epistle as the expression adequate to her condition; the final composition interprets the epistolary collection retrospectively as the sad elegiac song of women unhappy for the loss of the man they love.[43] Sappho is doubly a nightingale, as a poetess and as, here, the author of an elegiac lament. One would have to attribute to the presumed interpolator of the *epistula Sapphus* a theoretical awareness and an expressive capacity not only uncommon in general[44] but also hard to attribute to the writer responsible for 'an innocent attempt to supply a missing poem as the author believed Ovid would have done it'.[45] Not on the linguistic or stylistic level of the text's surface, but in its internal structure and in the very conception which gives it form, he would be an imitator (or a forger) too similar to Ovid to be, in the end, someone we could believe in.

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nunc denique, silvis / deflet Threicium Daulias ales Ityn; / alcyonum tales ventosa per aequora questus / ad surdas tenui voce sonantur aquas depends in turn upon the *epist. Sapph.* (*mitis nunc denique* seems to provide a corrective clarification of *virum non ulta pie* of *epist. Sapph.* 153). Of course, if we accept the posteriority of the *consolatio ad Liviam* (the date of which is uncertain, but the likeliest proposals do not go beyond the beginning of the Neronian period: cf. H. Schoonhoven, *The Pseudo-Ovidian Ad Liviam de morte Drusi* [Groningen, 1992], pp. 37–8; J. L. Butrica, *CR* 43 [1993], 265, does not even find anything in it incompatible with the Augustan age), it follows that the attribution of the *epistula Sapphus* to the Neronian or Flavian period, as suggested by Tarrant (n. 1), 134, is to be excluded (the *termini post* and *ante quem* set by Murgia [n. 3], 466, are instead respectively *Pont.* 2.10 and the tragedies of Seneca).

[41] On *mollis* as a technical term of elegy cf. Fedeli on Prop. 1.7.19 and Spoth (n. 35), p. 72 n. 45.

[42] Ov. *am.* 2.4.9–10 *non est forma meos quae certa invitet amores: / centum sunt causae cur ego semper amem* also depends directly upon this Propertian passage. There are some observations on the Sappho epistle's reuse of Ovid's erotic poetry in Jacobson (n. 4), p. 298 (who however—beside interpreting the whole poem, quite improbably, as parodic—speaks indistinctly of poetic activity, without noting the specificity of Sappho's discourse on elegy).

[43] On the relation of the *heroides* to elegy see now above all the specific monograph of F. Spoth (n. 35).

[44] So much so that Tarrant's judgement (n. 1), 135–6, seems too severe: 'It is my private opinion that the *ES* is a tedious production containing hardly a moment of wit, elegance, or truth to nature, and that its ascription to Ovid ought never to have been taken seriously'.

[45] Murgia (n. 3), 466 n. 24.