IV ELEGIAC CONVENTION AS ARTISTIC DILEMMA: *HEROIDES* 15

Ingenium Galli pulchra Lycoris erat.
—Mart., *Epigrams* 73.6

Ingenium nobis ipsa puella facit.
—Prop. 2.1.4

Sed cur heu, Ligurine, cur
    manat rara meas lacrima per genas?
Cur facunda parum decoro
    inter verba cadit lingua silentio?
—Horace, *Odes* 4.1

Sappho to Phaon

Tell me: with your first glance at this learned and passionate hand,
did your eyes instantly tell you it was mine?
Or if you had not read the name of the writer, Sappho's name,
would you fail to know from whose hand this brief letter came?
5 And perhaps you will ask why I write in elegy's rhythms
when my sure gifts lie in the lyric mode.
This love of mine demands tears: elegy is the music for pain.
No lyre can fit its intervals to my grieving.

I burn, I burn like the rich field ablaze with its harvest of fire,
10 while the winds from the East, masterless, fan the flames.
Far away are the fields of Aetna: your presence there assigns them to fame:
but a heat no less intense than Aetna's devours me here.
And no poems come to me, come to life, no songs I can marry to harmony
with the strings of the lyre: poetry is work for a mind at rest.
15 And no, not the girls of Pyrrha, nor the maidens of Methymna,
nor the whole throng of Lesbos' children: none please me, none.
Anactorië is nothing to me; incandescent Cydro, nothing.
I take no pleasure in the sight of Atthis, as once I did, none in the sight
of the hundred others I loved—and by loving earned some reproach.
20 What many women claimed for their own, you, in your cruelty, possess alone.
You are beautiful; your years are ripe for the pleasures of love—
Your treacherous beauty! It has ensnared my sight—
Take up a lyre and quiver: you are Apollo embodied and alive.
Let horns appear above your brow, and Bacchus appears: he is you!

25 And Phoebus loved Daphne, and Bacchus loved the maiden of Cnossos.
Yet neither of them, neither, was one who wrote lyric poems.
But the daughters of Pegasus speak to me, speak songs utterly sweet,
and even now the whole world is alive with the sound of my name.
And not even my countryman, Alcaeus, the comrade of my lyre, is granted more fame
30 than I, although his poetry resounds to strains far grander than mine.

If stubborn nature has refused me beauty,
then weigh my measure of genius against beauty's default.
I am small, yet I have a name to fill all the world;
the measure of my stature is my fame.

HEROIDES 15

Ecquid, ut adspecta est studiosae littera dextrae,
protinus est oculis cognita nostra tuis—
an, nisi legisses auctoris nomina Sapphus,
hoc breve nescires unde movetur opus?
5 forsitan et quare mea sint alterna requiras
carmina, cum lyricis sim magis apta modis.
flendus amor meus est—elegiae flebile carmen;
non facit ad lacrimas barbitos ulla meas.

Uror, ut indomitis ignem exercentibus Euris
10 fertilis accensis messibus ardet ager.
arva, Phaon, celebras diversa Typhoidos Aetnae;
me calor Aetnaeo non minor igne tenet.
nec mihi, dispositis quae iungam carmina nervis,
proveniunt; vacuae carmina mentis opus!
15 nec me Pyrrhiades Methymniadesve puellae,
nec me Lesbiadum cetera turba iuvant.
vilis Anactorie, vilis mihi candida Cydro;
non oculis grata est Atthis, ut ante, meis,
atque aliae centum, quas hic sine crimine amavi;
20 inprobe, multarum quod fuit, unus habes.
est in te facies, sunt apti lusibus anni—
o facies oculis insidiosa meis!
sume fidem et pharetram—fies manifestus Apollo;
accedant capiti cornua—Bacchus eris!

25 Et Phoebus Daphnen, et Gnosida Bacchus amavit,
nec norat lyricos illa vel illa modos;
at mihi Pegasides blandissima carmina dictant;
iam canitur toto nomen in orbe meum.
nec plus Alcaeus, consors patriaeque lyraeque,
30 laudis habet, quamvis grandius ille sonet.

Si mihi difficilis formam natura negavit,
ingenio formae damna repende meae.
sum brevis, at nomen, quod terras inpleat omnes,
est mihi; mensuram nominis ipsa fero.

If I am not fair, yet Perseus found Cepheus' Andromeda fair to look on,
and tawny-dark, with the dusk color of her home.
And doves of white are sometimes mated with others of different hue,
and the green bird loves the black turtle-dove.
If, unless her beauty appears worthy of your own, no woman
40 will belong to you, then not one will ever be yours.

But once I seemed beautiful enough, when I read my poems to you.
You swore that—alone among women—I took grace always from the words
I spoke.
I would sing, I remember . . . lovers remember it all . . .
As I sang, you returned me my kisses, kisses stolen while I sang.
45 You would praise them, too, and in all ways I was pleasing to you,
but especially then, when we practiced the art of our love.
Then, more than ever, my wanton play delighted you,
my constant motion, my observances of delight,
and, with the body's exhaustion, that languor beyond languor in us both,
50 after that final, fine confusion of our desire.

But now new victims come to you: the girls of Sicily.
What is Lesbos to me? I wish Sicily were my home.
O dismiss the truant from your land,
Nisaean mothers, and Nisaean maids;
55 do not be deceived by the lies of his beguiling tongue:
what he now says to you, he said before, to me.
And you, too, Erycina, you who haunt the mountains of Sicily—
for I am yours—protect, O goddess, your own poet!

Must my life's fortune hold to the grim course on which it began
60 and pursue in bitterness its inexorable direction forever?
I was not yet seven years old when the bed that held the body of my father,
dead before his time, drank the water of my tears.
My misguided brother, trapped in infatuate passion for a whore,
at once lost his wealth at the cost of disgrace and shame.
65 Reduced to poverty, he plies the blue ocean with his agile oar and seeks
by shameful means the wealth that by shameful means he lost.
And I, who loyally offered him good and frequent warning, am the object of his hatred.
This has my candor brought me, this the reward for dutiful speech.
And, as if there were any lack of things to wear me out endlessly,
70 my small daughter fills my cup of sorrows to the brim.
And now you come, too, the last of my causes for complaint.
My ship is driven by an ill wind, and in the wrong direction.

35 candida si non sum, placuit Cepheia Perseo
Andromede, patriae fusca colore suae.
et variis albae iunguntur saepe columbae,
et niger a viridi turtur amatur ave.
si, nisi quae facie poterit te digna videri,
40 nulla futura tua est, nulla futura tua est.

At mea cum legerem, sat iam formosa videbar;
unam iurabas usque decere loqui.
cantabam, memini—meminerunt omnia amantes—
oscula cantanti tu mihi rapta dabas.
45 haec quoque laudabas, omnique a parte placebam—
sed tum praecipue, cum fit amoris opus.
tunc te plus solito lascivia nostra iuvabat,
crebraque mobilitas aptaque verba ioco,
et quod, ubi amborum fuerat confusa voluptas,
50 plurimus in lasso corpore langnor erat.

Nunc tibi Sicelides veniunt nova praeda puellae.
quid mihi cum Lesbo? Sicelis esse volo.
o vos erronem tellure remittite vestra,
Nisiades matres Nisiadesque nurus,
55 nec vos decipiant blandae mendacia linguae!
quae dicit vobis, dixerat ante mihi.
tu quoque, quae montes celebras, Erycina, Sicanos—
nam tua sum—vati consule, diva, tuae!

An gravis inceptum peragit fortuna tenorem
60 et manet in cursu semper acerba suo?
sex mihi natales ierant, cum lecta parentis
ante diem lacrimas ossa bibere meas.
arsit iners frater meretricis captus amore
mixtaque cum turpi damna pudore tulit;
65 factus inops agili peragit freta caerula remo,
quasque male amisit, nunc male quaerit opes.
me quoque, quod monui bene multa fideliter, odit;
hoc mihi libertas, hoc pia lingua dedit.
et tamquam desint, quae me sine fine fatigent,
70 accumulat curas filia parva meas.
ultima tu nostris accedis causa querelis.
non agitur vento nostra carina suo.

Look! My hair falls, unkempt, about my shoulders:
    my fingers do not suffer the weight of one translucent stone.
75 The dress I wear is shabby, I wear no gold in my hair,
    my curls accept no tribute from scented Araby.
For whom should my misery adorn itself? Whom should I try to please?
    He, the one agent of my elegance, has gone from me.
My heart is fragile, and easily pierced by weapons that are light,
80   and there is always a reason why I should always be in love—
either because the fates bound me by this condition at my birth
    and spun my life without a single sturdy thread
or because what you do love turns into who you *are* and becomes your *life* and Thalia,
    who commands my art, has made my nature subtle, and matched me to my poems.
85 What wonder then, if the downy cheek of adolescence and that time of life
    in which boys storm the captive heart of manhood have captured me?

I used to fear you, Aurora, afraid you would steal him to fill Cephalus' place—
    and you would, but that your first conquest still occupies your soul.
If Diana, who looks on all things, should look upon him,
90   it would be Phaon whose eternal slumber she would devise.
Venus would have carried him to heaven in her ivory car, but that she does
    look on him, and sees that he would win the love of Mars, who is hers.
O you, not yet a man, no longer a boy—the perfect years,
    your time's chief ornament and the glory of your age,
95 come to me, my lovely, sail back into the havens of my embrace.
    I beg you, not begging for your love, but that you permit my loving you.
Even as I write, tears spring to my eyes, and fall;
    See: this part of my letter is everywhere blurred.

If you were so determined to leave me, you might have left more kindly,
100   and you might at least have said "My lady of Lesbos, farewell."
You took with you no tears, none of my kisses;
    to the last I had no thought of the pain I was to endure.
You have left me nothing, nothing but your cruelty,
    and you have no keepsake, no token of my love reminding you of me.
105 I asked nothing of you, nor would I have asked for anything
    except your consent simply to remember me.

I swear by my love for you—may my love stay close forever—
    and by the nine goddesses whose will is my own,
I swear that when someone said to me "Your happiness is escaping"
110   for a long time I was unable either to cry or to speak.

Ecce, iacent collo sparsi sine lege capilli,
    nec premit articulos lucida gemma meos;
75 veste tegor vili, nullum est in crinibus aurum,
    non Arabum noster dona capillus habet.
cui colar infelix, aut cui placuisse laborem?
    ille mei cultus unicus auctor abest.
molle meum levibusque cor est violabile telis,
80   et semper causa est, cur ego semper amem—
sive ita nascenti legem dixere Sorores
    nec data sunt vitae fila severa meae,
sive abeunt studia in mores, artisque magistra
    ingenium nobis molle Thalia facit.
85 quid mirum, si me primae lanuginis aetas
    abstulit, atque anni quos vir amare potest?

Hunc ne pro Cephalo raperes, Aurora, timebam—
    et faceres, sed te prima rapina tenet!
hunc si conspiciat quae conspicit omnia Phoebe,
90   iussus erit somnos continuare Phaon;
hunc Venus in caelum curru vexisset eburno,
    sed videt et Marti posse placere suo.
o nec adhuc iuvenis, nec iam puer, utilis aetas,
    o decus atque aevi gloria magna tui,
95 huc ades inque sinus, formose, relabere nostros!
    non ut ames oro, verum ut amere sinas.
scribimus, et lacrimis oculi rorantur abortis;
    adspice, quam sit in hoc multa litura loco!

Si tam certus eras hinc ire, modestius isses,
100   et modo dixisses "Lesbi puella, vale!"
non tecum lacrimas, non oscula nostra tulisti;
    denique non timui, quod dolitura fui.
nil de te mecum est nisi tantum iniuria; nec tu,
    admoneat quod te, pignus amantis habes.
105 non mandata dedi, neque enim mandata dedissem
    ulla, nisi ut nolles inmemor esse mei.

Per tibi—qui numquam longe discedat!—amorem,
    perque novem iuro, numina nostra, deas,
cum mihi nescio quis "fugiunt tua gaudia" dixit,
110   nec me flere diu, nec potuisse loqui!

My eyes had no tears, my tongue no words,
a clear chill gripped my heart.
When my grief had discovered itself, I was lost to shame:
I beat my breast, tore my hair, and I wailed aloud, violently,
115 much like a loving mother whose son has been taken from her
when she carries his vacant form to the tall pyre.
My brother, Charaxus, takes pleasure in my grief and, swollen
with joy of it, walks back and forth before me, and then,
in order to degrade its cause, says
120 "Why should she cry? Her daughter is still alive."
There is no agreement between modesty and love. The entire town was watching;
I tore open my dress, and I tore my naked breasts.

I can only think of you, Phaon. My dreams bring you back to me—
dreams more intense and dazzling than radiant day.
125 I find you in those dreams, although you are worlds away.
But sleep offers pleasures too brief to satisfy.
Often it seems that your arms are holding the weight of my neck,
often I seem to be holding your head in my arms;
the kisses are familiar, those kisses, tongue to tongue, I recognize them,
130 the kisses you used to take and give back to me.
Sometimes I caress you, and say words that seem utterly real,
and my lips are awake, responsive to all that I feel.
I hesitate to say what happens next, but it all happens,
there's no choice, just joy, and I'm inundated with it.

135 But when Titan reveals himself, his presence exposing all things,
I can only grieve that my dreams have left me so soon.
I seek out the caves and the woods, as though they were any use—
but woods and caves shared in the secret of my delights.
I rush there wildly, maddened, like one whom frantic Bellona has touched,
140 my hair loosened, falling about my shoulders.
I look at the caves, at the coarse stone of their arches,
that had once seemed like Lydian marble to me;
I come upon the forest that offered us many times
the bed we lay upon, and whose abundant boughs covered us in darkness.
145 But I do not find the master, the forest's lord, and mine. The place
is only impoverished earth; his presence was the grace that endowed it.

I recognized the grass, pressed down, of the familiar hollow
our bodies made in the blades on the green remembered bank.

et lacrimae deerant oculis et verba palato,
adstrictum gelido frigore pectus erat.
postquam se dolor invenit, nec pectora plangi
nec puduit scissis exululare comis,
115 non aliter, quam si nati pia mater adempti
portet ad exstructos corpus inane rogos.
gaudet et e nostro crescit maerore Charaxus
frater, et ante oculos itque reditque meos,
utque pudenda mei videatur causa doloris,
120 "quid dolet haec? certe filia vivit!" ait.
non veniunt in idem pudor atque amor. omne videbat
vulgus; eram lacero pectus aperta sinu.

Tu mihi cura, Phaon; te somnia nostra reducunt—
somnia formoso candidiora die.
125 illic te invenio, quamvis regionibus absis;
sed non longa satis gaudia somnus habet
saepe tuos nostra cervice onerare lacertos,
saepe tuae videor supposuisse meos;
oscula cognosco, quae tu committere linguae
130 aptaque consueras accipere, apta dare.
blandior interdum verisque simillima verba
eloquor, et vigilant sensibus ora meis.
ulteriora pudet narrare, sed omnia fiunt,
et iuvat, et siccae non licet esse mihi.

135 At cum se Titan ostendit et omnia secum,
tam cito me somnos destituisse queror;
antra nemusque peto, tamquam nemus antraque prosint—
conscia deliciis illa fuere meis.
illuc mentis inops, ut quam furialis Enyo
140 attigit, in collo crine iacente feror.
antra vident oculi scabro pendentia tofo,
quae mihi Mygdonii marmoris instar erant;
invenio silvam, quae saepe cubilia nobis
praebuit et multa texit opaca coma—
145 sed non invenio dominum silvaeque meumque.
vile solum locus est; dos erat ille loci.

Cognovi pressas noti mihi caespitis herbas;
de nostro curvum pondere gramen erat.

I lay down and touched the place, the part in which you lay.
150 The earth that once delighted me was thirsty and drank in my tears.
Even the branches have cast off their leaves; they seem to mourn;
the birds are quiet; none make their dear lament.
Only the nightingale, only Philomel, whose terrible grief took vengeance
most terrible against her husband, laments for Itys her son.
155 The nightingale sings of Itys, her abandoned love is Sappho's song:
Only that; all else is as silent as the dead of night.

There is a shining spring there, its water clearer than any glass.
There are many who think a spirit lives within.
Above the spring a water-lotus opens wide its branches—
160 a single tree: a whole grove. The delicate mosses make the earth there green.
Tired, and in tears, I lay down here at last to take my rest
when before my eyes, a Naiad appeared, and stopped.
Standing before me she spoke: "You must seek out Ambracia's land,
for you burn in the fire of a love that is not returned.
165 From his temple above, Apollo looks down on the open sea
—Actium, the people call it, and Leucadian.
From here Deucalion, aflame with love for Pyrrha,
hurled himself down and struck the water unharmed.
Instantly that love for Pyrrha escaped his stubborn heart:
170 Deucalion was released from the fire of love.
It is the law of that place. Go now, find the cliff
of high Leucas, and do not be afraid to leap."

She had spoken, and was gone. I rose in terror
and could not contain my tears.
175 I shall go, nymph, I shall find the cliff you spoke of.
Let my fear leave me, banished by maddened love.
Whatever happens will be better than this is now. Breeze,
come quickly. My body is not heavy at all.
You too, soft Love, place your wings beneath me as I fall
180 so that I do not die, a reproach to Leucady's wave.
Then my lyre, our common gift, I'll dedicate to Apollo
and below it shall be one verse, then another:
SAPPHO THE POET, APOLLO, HAS GRATEFULLY GIVEN HER LYRE TO YOU:
IT SUITS ME WELL: FOR YOU IT IS FITTING TOO.

185 But why do you send me grieving to the shores of Actium
when you yourself might turn back your escaping steps?

incubui tetigique locum, qua parte fuisti;
150 grata prius lacrimas conbibit herba meas.
quin etiam rami positis lugere videntur
frondibus, et nullae dulce queruntur aves;
sola virum non ulta pie maestissima mater
concinit Ismarium Daulias ales Ityn.
155 ales Ityn, Sappho desertos cantat amores—
hactenus; ut media cetera nocte silent.

Est nitidus vitroque magis perlucidus omni
fons sacer—hunc multi numen habere putant—
quem supra ramos expandit aquatica lotos,
160 una nemus; tenero caespite terra viret.
hic ego cum lassos posuissem flebilis artus,
constitit ante oculos Naias una meos.
constitit et dixit: "quoniam non ignibus aequis
ureris, Ambracia est terra petenda tibi.
165 Phoebus ab excelso, quantum patet, adspicit aequor—
Actiacum populi Leucadiumque vocant.
hinc se Deucalion Pyrrhae succensus amore
misit, et inlaeso corpore pressit aquas.
nec mora, versus amor fugit lentissima Pyrrhae
170 pectora, Deucalion igne levatus erat.
hanc legem locus ille tenet. pete protinus altam
Leucada nec saxo desiluisse time!"

Ut monuit, cum voce abiit; ego territa surgo,
nec lacrimas oculi continuere mei.
175 ibimus, o nymphe, monstrataque saxa petemus;
sit procul insano victus amore timor!
quidquid erit, melius quam nunc erit! aura, subito;
et mea non magnum corpora pondus habent.
tu quoque, mollis Amor, pennas suppone cadenti,
180 ne sim Leucadiae mortua crimen aquae!
inde chelyn Phoebo, communia munera, ponam,
et sub ea versus unus et alter erunt:
GRATA LYRAM POSUI TIBI, PHOEBE, POETRIA SAPPHO:
CONVENIT ILLA MIHI, CONVENIT ILLA TIBI.

185 Cur tamen Actiacas miseram me mittis ad oras,
cum profugum possis ipse referre pedem?

You can heal me more than Leucady's wave.
    By your beauty, and by your kindness, you will be Apollo to me.
Or can you, fiercer than any cliff or wave, if I die,
190 bear to be known as the one who caused my death?
How much better that my breast be pressed to your breast
    than to be hurled from those cliffs headlong
—the breast, Phaon, which you used to praise, and which
    so often seemed to you to have genius within it.

195 I wish I were eloquent now! Sorrow checks my art
    and all my genius is halted by my grief.
My old power for poetry will not come at my call;
    my plectrum is sorrowing and silent, sorrow has hushed my lyre.
Daughters of the island of Lesbos, children married and soon to be wed,
200 daughters of Lesbos, your names sung to the Aeolian lyre,
Lesbian women I have loved, and in loving hurt my fame,
    do not come crowding any longer to hear my music.
Phaon has stolen everything that once was pleasing to you,
    Phaon, alas, I came close to calling him mine.
205 Bring him back; your singer too will return.
    He gives power to my genius: he takes it away.

But do my prayers do anything at all? Do they move his country heart?
    Or is it frozen, and do the Zephyrs carry off my fallen words?
I wish the winds that carry my words away might return your sails.
    To return, stubborn one, would be fitting, if you could feel.
210 Or if you are preparing the votive gifts for your stern,
    why then do you tear my heart with your delay?
Weigh anchor. Venus, born from the sea, smoothes the waves for a lover.
    The wind will speed your course. Only weigh anchor!
215 Cupid himself will sit as pilot at your stern. With delicate hand
    he will himself furl and unfurl the sail.
But if it is your desire to flee from Pelasgian Sappho
    —although you will find no reason to flee from me—
at least let a cruel letter tell me this is my pain:
220 that I may look in Leucadia's waters for my fate.

tu mihi Leucadia potes esse salubrior unda;
    et forma et meritis tu mihi Phoebus eris.
an potes, o scopulis undaque ferocior omni,
190 si moriar, titulum mortis habere meae?
at quanto melius iungi mea pectora tecum
    quam poterant saxis praecipitanda dari!
haec sunt illa, Phaon, quae tu laudare solebas,
    visaque sunt totiens ingeniosa tibi.

195 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.
Lesbides aequoreae, nupturaque nuptaque proles,
200 Lesbides, Aeolia nomina dicta lyra,
Lesbides, infamem quae me fecistis amatae,
    desinite ad citharas turba venire meas!
abstulit omne Phaon, quod vobis ante placebat,
    me miseram, dixi quam modo paene "meus!"
205 efficite ut redeat; vates quoque vestra redibit.
    ingenio vires ille dat, ille rapit.

Ecquid ago precibus, pectusve agreste movetur?
    an riget, et Zephyri verba caduca ferunt?
qui mea verba ferunt, vellem tua vela referrent;
210 hoc te, si saperes, lente, decebat opus.
sive redis, puppique tuae votiva parantur
    munera, quid laceras pectora nostra mora?
solve ratem! Venus orta mari mare praestat amanti.
    aura dabit cursum; tu modo solve ratem!
215 ipse gubernabit residens in puppe Cupido;
    ipse dabit tenera vela legetque manu.
sive iuvat longe fugisse Pelasgida Sapphon—
    non tamen invenies, cur ego digna fugi—
hoc saltem miserae crudelis epistula dicat,
220 ut mihi Leucadiae fata petantur aquae!

1 ❀ *Abeunt Studia in Mores*

Past her prime and rapidly losing hold of her sexual attractions (attractions prodigious enough, but previously exercised primarily in the dubious tutelage of young ladies), a woman enters a degrading liaison with a handsome gondolier far younger than she, and unfaithful. He deserts her. She, regarding neither dignity nor reputation, and finding but brief consolation in nocturnal erotic dreams, first suffers copious ecstasies of anguish and then commits suicide, dramatically. She throws herself, in a state of unpalatable *deshabille*, from a cliff, illustrating by her fall the justice of the poet's commonplace: "the blood of youth burns not with such excess / as gravity's revolt to wantonness."

A mature poet, a woman gifted with a genius of perception and expression so fine as to earn her the title of "the tenth muse," succumbs to an unhappy infatuation, unprecedented in her experience, for a beautiful youth. He abandons her. She is a mockery to her family, an enigma to her friends, and a stranger to herself. Never beautiful, her only fascination her song, she is left to the dangerous contemplation of her waning and unavailing poetic powers. Unable to summon the passionate detachment by which alone she might rescue a world gone chaotic and unfamiliar, a world now too desperate for poetry, she seeks release, or oblivion, in death. Exiled from her redeeming art and engulfed by a vengeful reality, she might well lament, with Ovid:

> omnia perdidimus; tantummodo vita relicta est
> praebeat ut sensum materiemque mali. (*Pont.* 4.16.49–50)

> I have lost everything; life alone remains, to give me the
> consciousness and the substance of sorrow.

The Sappho of *Heroides* 15 is both of these women. Ovid's unique kind of parody is most clearly seen in the duplicitous glance, not without malevolence and not without compassion, which he levels upon Sappho the Poet and Sappho the Legend. Socrates, we are told, demonstrated that comedy and tragedy grow from one source and that an alteration in the lighting suffices to change one into the other. Ovid throughout this poem shifts his illumination, leaving stage, characters, and action intact. Upon the gauche and somewhat tawdry easel inherited from Menander,[1] Diphilus,[2] and Plato Comicus,[3] with conscious revivification of artifices and *topoi* derived from Sappho herself and ostentatious loyalty to the conventions and colors of Latin elegy, he lavishes all possible wit and terror.

Ovid cannot be said to be kind to Sappho in any simple sense. He omits nothing in her situation that would reduce her dignity or degrade her infatuation—except for the myth that Aphrodite, in the first flush of her not entirely maternal love for the adopted Phaon, hid him in a cabbage leaf.[4] Ovid's Sappho has dreams too explicit for blushing translators to contemplate. She is pathetic, if not grotesque, in her vaunted skill in sexual performance. Her unconvincing discursus on the beauty of mind (her mind) is foolish and certainly self-deceived, especially when juxtaposed with her raptures on Phaon's beardless body. Her credulous account of the therapy session with the Naiad is a glaring travesty of the Sapphic epiphany. And the various conventional devices of elegy—the betrayed lover's complaint, the warning to her successors, the judicious intervention of saner contemporaries, the malicious intervention of saner relatives, the revisitation of romantic haunts, the assertion that poetry is beyond price, the composition of the poet-lover's epitaph—because pirated at once so transparently and so fulsomely from a tradition alien to Greek lyric, divert attention from Sappho's passion to the gross implausibility and artificiality of its Roman, and Ovidian, context.

Nothing more facilitates the ironic stance than a subject sentimental and romantic in its embellishment, yet in its naked shape bizarre and farcically erotic. Ovid's caprice was such, however, that while he claimed the right to be amused, he claimed the privilege, as well, to be bemused, that is, to wonder and to speculate upon what is mysterious and abiding beneath the clumsy surface of the human comedy. His Sappho epistle is, indeed, a bourgeois travesty of the sentimental legend of Sappho's death.[5] Yet singularly often in this poem, a palpably lyric strain treads the skirts of the artificial elegiac. The parody of being

[1] Menander's *Leucadia*, reported in Strabo 10.452: ἔχει δὲ τὸ τοῦ Λευκάτα Ἀπόλλωνος ἱερὸν καὶ τὸ ἅλμα τὸ τοὺς ἔρωτας παύειν πεπιστευμένον· οὗ δὴ λέγεται πρώτη Σαπφὼ ὥς πού φησιν ὁ Μένανδρος. Kock, *CAF*, fr. 312, gives: τὸν ὑπέρκομπον θηρῶσα Φαῶν'/ οἰστρῶντι πόθῳ ῥῖψαι πέτρας/ἀπὸ τηλεφανοῦς ἅλμα κατ' εὐχὴν/σήν, δέσποτ' ἄναξ.

[2] We have only the title of Diphilus' play, one of six plays on Phaon known by title. See Albin Lesky, *A History of Greek Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1966), p. 663.

[3] Plato Comicus wrote a play about Phaon which seems to have been rather coarse. Lesky, *Greek Literature*, p. 422, writes: "This play came out in 431, and Plato at this time, like Aristophanes, allowed political satire to take a back seat. It is concerned with the fabled phallic demon after whom women run mad—the figure which appears so strangely metamorphosed in the story of Sappho's death."

[4] Purser, in *P. Ovidi Nasonis Heroides*, ed. Arthur Palmer (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1967), says that the lettuce "deadened Phaon's affection for all rivals." See Aelian, *Varia Historia* 12.18.

[5] Lesky, *Greek Literature*, p. 140, says that Ovid "translated the fable into bourgeois terms."

carried away becomes a passion seriously meant, and the stock equipment of elegy becomes living presence. And this for an obvious reason: Ovid extricates from the sentimental and romantic story what was probably the decisive factor in its genesis, the implicit notion of love as the poet's nemesis, of nature's final tyranny upon the artist, of life's vengeance upon art. *Abeunt studia in mores*: "The poet's crafted fiction becomes the life she lives."

Euripides was reported to have been torn to pieces by dogs—an appropriate finale for an atheist and scorner of the gods.[6] Lucretius, it was said, died when a love philter backfired—fit retribution for Book Four of the *De Rerum Natura*.[7] And Sappho died heterosexually, at long last in love with a man—an appropriate end for a woman whose habit it was, as Bowra wrote (employing an archly evasive euphemism), to "preside over the ripening desires of young women."[8] Yet there is a crucial difference between Ovid's treatment of Sappho's death and the conventional "ironic death" for which the ancients had developed a taste. Ovid's Sappho undergoes the knife without anaesthesia. She is at all times appallingly aware of her own metamorphosis and appallingly unprepared for it. She dies alive to her own annihilation.

If in the cruel and comic moments of the poem Sappho is diminished to the stature of *any* woman under the dominion of *furialis Enyo*,[9] Bellona, the frantic goddess of war, the uncomfortable banality of her portrait is linked rigorously and without deviation to the erosion of Sappho's poetic self by the retributive claims of her natural and common humanity. Her art is played out. She becomes life's plaything, like anybody else. Ovid concentrates wit upon Sappho the woman, the crazed cliff-jumper-to-be, but terror upon Sappho the writer, already fallen from timelessness into flux, from craft into caricature.

The distinction between the claims of art and life is the pivot upon which Ovid's vacillating vision of Sappho turns. It is a distinction which seems, on the surface, suspiciously modern. Yet it can be argued, and will be argued here, that Ovid professed (and even possibly believed) what may seem an acutely modern and post-Romantic appre-

[6] In this connection Lesky, *Greek Literature*, p. 363, writes: "In Euripides' case it is demonstrated to what extent the death of great men is a theme irresistible to the anecdote-mongers."

[7] D.E.W. Wormell, "The Personal World of Lucretius," in *Lucretius*, ed. D. R. Dudley (New York: Basic Books, 1965), pp. 36–37, hypothesizes the origins of St. Jerome's "sensational assertion."

[8] Quoted by H. Lloyd Jones, "Sir Maurice Bowra," *Proc. Brit. Acad.* 58 (1972): p. 9.

[9] Housman's emendation for *furialis Erichtho*.

ciation of the poetic conflict not only between *ars* and *ingenium* but between *ars* and *ingenium* and "life." It would be hazardous, though, to begin too casually to "descant upon the supreme theme of art and song" and upon the theme conventionally ancillary to it, the relationship of art and life, a subject which has exercised the imagination of poets, philosophers, and critics since earliest antiquity. It would be judicious to retreat from Ovid and his Sappho for now and to isolate some aspects of the issue most useful in formulating an approach to Ovid's poetic treatment of the question within his specifically erotic context.

Albin Lesky, in the course of his remarks on the erotically colored choral lyrics of Ibycus of Samos, delivers a truism which has the merit of brevity and truth: "In both [his] poems a conception is embodied which was widespread among the Greeks: Love comes to man as a dangerous and maddening power, stealing away his very self; grief is of its essence."[10] Lesky's remark limits quite cogently the Greek notion of love. It was a notion adopted by the Romans, by way of the early Roman tragedians and Lucretius, in their version of love's effects, if not its "essence." To the Romans, love's "essence" was as frequently *levis* (light), if not trivial, even within the framework of elegiac grief. But Lesky stops provocatively short of explaining why such a view of love exerted so compelling a hold on the dramatists of Greece, especially Euripides, and on the archaic and Alexandrian poets of love. G. Wilson Knight, in an essay on the Christian context of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, ventures indirectly upon the explanation Lesky omits. He writes:

> The play's attention is confined chiefly to sexual ethics, which in isolation is naturally the most pregnant of analysis and most universal of all themes. No other subject provides so clear a contrast between human consciousness and human instinct; so rigid a distinction between the civilized and natural qualities of man.[11]

And yet if in the lives of ordinary men and women, sensual love and erotic fascination seem to endanger consciousness and civilization so much that instinct threatens to steal away one's very self, then for the poet love holds a kind of double jeopardy. His art requires life for sustenance yet requires that life keep its proper distance, for "caught

[10] Lesky, *Greek Literature*, p. 184.

[11] G. Wilson Knight, "*Measure for Measure* and the Gospels," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Measure for Measure*, ed. G. L. Geckle (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 28.

in that sensual music all neglect / monuments of unageing intellect." As Yeats very well knew, "the lines that young men, tossing on their beds / rhymed out in love's despair / to flatter beauty's ignorant ear" were not really Catullus' lines at all. Yeats' Catullus, while certainly no scholar, is yet another figment, poetry's way of keeping up its self-respect, a passionate artifice wearing the mask of passion.

Quite often modern poets have found themselves dangerously entrapped in the proverbial tension between the demands of art and experience, or love. One can scarcely read even a serious literary biography without breathing an air thick with the dispersal of the fine ash of romances disastrously consumed: a kind of belletristic fallout which is the specialty and delight of purveyors of literary obituaries. But writers who choose, either in autobiographical, fictive, or critical discourse, to dwell upon this subject quite regularly conceive of their own or the artist's somewhat banal predicament as a holy war, a crusade against the deadly extension of the kingdom of the banal, a struggle to rescue art from that "process" which is water to the poet's flame. Harold Bloom, in his book *The Anxiety of Influence*, writes, perhaps more "poetically" than persuasively:

> The Covering Cherub then is a demon of continuity; his baleful charm imprisons the present in the past, and reduces a world of differences into a grayness of uniformity. The identity of past and present is at one with the essential identity of all objects. This is Milton's "universe of death" and with it poetry cannot live, for poetry must leap, it must locate itself in a discontinuous universe and it must make that universe (as Blake did) if it cannot find one. . . . *The pressing desire in the unconscious for some irreplaceable thing often resolves itself into an endless series in actuality (Freud), a pattern particularly prevalent in the love lives of most poets or perhaps of any post-Romantic men and women cursed with strong imagination.*[12] (My emphasis)

For Adrian Leverhühn in Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* (much as for Sören Kierkegaard in *Diary of a Seducer*), life, instantiated as love, steals from possibility and hence from creation:

> That he could have as many love affairs as he chose seemed to satisfy him; it was as though he shrank from every connection with the actual because he saw therein a theft from the possible. The

[12] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 38.

> potential was his kingdom, its endless spaces his domain—therein and thus far he was really a poet.[13]

Yet often the artist's choice of the perfection of work over the perfection of life precipitates a regret at the felt eclipse of feeling:

> Does the imagination dwell the most
> Upon a woman won or woman lost?
> If on the lost, admit you turned aside
> From a great labyrinth out of pride,
> Cowardice, or some silly over-subtle thought
> Or anything called conscience once,
> And that if memory recur, the sun's
> Under eclipse and the day's blotted out.[14]

In the history of Western poetry, such regret has attached itself quite naturally to versions of Neoplatonism and has become exalted to the stature of a preoccupying or even obsessive poetic issue:

> In departing from the unitary aspiration of his own youth, Milton may be said to have fathered the poetry that we call post-Enlightenment, or Romantic, the poetry that takes as its obsessive theme the power of the mind over the universe of death, or, as Wordsworth phrased it, to what extent the mind is lord and master, outward sense the servant of her will.[15]

That issue, incapable of real resolution, has come to beget the poetry of the idealization of the substitute, the willful avowal of imagination as "The Necessary Angel of Reality" (Wallace Stevens), or the poetry of modern depression, of the "surrendered dream":

> The surrendered dream is not merely a phantasmagoria of endless gratification, but is the greatest of all human illusion, the vision of immortality. . . . Wordsworth's ode plangently also awakens into failure and into the creative mind's protest against time's tyranny.[16]

A fragment from yet another poet, Anacreon, will show that the

[13] Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, trans. H. Lowe-Porter (New York: Modern Library, 1948), p. 169.
[14] W. B. Yeats, "The Tower," pt. 2.
[15] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, p. 39.
[16] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, p. 35.

question under discussion was alive as a problem (although in this instance unformulated) to the writers of the archaic "subjective-erotic" lyric, and alive as well as an issue to sensitive scholars of that period. The fragment is quoted as Anacreon's (376) by Hephaestios (*de poem.* 7.2) to illustrate a pro-ode:

> ἀρθεὶς δηὖτ' ἀπὸ Λευκάδος
> πέτρης ἐς πολιὸν κῦμα κολυμβῶ μεθύων ἔρωτι.

> Uplifted again, from the white Leucadian
> rock into the gray waves I plunge, drunk with desire.

In this fragment of a poem which Ovid quite probably knew in its entirety, a fragment especially important to us because it may contain the first literary reference to a leap from the Leucadian rock as a violent cure for unrequited love, Anacreon betrays a strange (and often re-marked upon) husbanding of passion. He suffers almost playfully. He is enamored of the condition of being enamored. Of this fragment Lesky remarks:

> The unexpected image of the fatal leap is here used to describe a yielding to delight. Yet at the very moment of his fall the poet is perfectly conscious of the pleasure of such intoxication.

In describing the context of Anacreon's amours, Lesky again writes in a similar vein:

> Romantic love with its tragic overtones has no place here. Ana-creon's amours should not be taken too seriously; nor can they be dismissed as pure pretence. There is no toying or trifling with love in these poems: its sweetness is expressed with an intensity which sometimes goes close to pain. The peculiar charm of this mature Ionic poet consists in a singular union of opposites. The poet who hates all excess and maintains such a careful balance between love and indifference, between drunkenness and sobriety, is always mas-ter of his medium.[17]

It does seem true of Anacreon that his artistic control is so delicate as to call his pretense into question. But Lesky's remarks, emptied of their incidental references to Anacreon, might well serve to describe, surprisingly perhaps, Sappho's characteristic balance. Denys Page, for

[17] Lesky, *Greek Literature*, p. 176.

example, has carefully discredited Longinus' misplaced flattery of the passionate Sappho's "whole congress of emotions." Her art, as Page persuasively argues, is the art of calculation raised to the level of mystery, relying upon an intense yet often whimsical detachment in which it is the poem, or poetry itself, that is the most beautiful thing on the dark earth, the thing Sappho most loves.

The poet John Donne might well have concurred with Denys Page's appreciation of the fiery Sappho's mysterious calculation. His postu-lated sympathy with Page's position, however, would not have been derived from a reading of Sappho, or merely from his knowledge of the exacting process of composition, but from his recognition of the problem as it is presented in Ovid's *Heroides* 15. In his "heroicall" epistle "Sappho to Philaenis," a poem in part based on *Heroides* 15, Donne imagines a Sappho magically delivered from her love for Phaon and restored to her persuasive and poetic powers:

> Such was my Phao, awhile, but shall be never
> As thou wast, art, and, oh, maist be ever. . . .
>
> My two lips, eyes, thighs, differ from thy two,
> But so, as thine from one another doe;
> And, oh, no more; the likenesse being such,
> Why should they not alike in all parts touch?
> Hand to strange hand, lippe to lippe none denies;
> Why should they brest to brest, or thighs to thighs?
> Likeness begets such strange selfe flatterie,
> That touching my selfe, all seemes done to thee.
> My selfe I embrace, and mine owne hands I kisse,
> And amourously thanke my selfe for this.
> Me, in my glasse, I call thee.

Donne's Sappho is unabashedly Lesbian; his treatment is as macabre and as anachronistic as Ovid's. Yet it is perfectly faithful to the central implication of Ovid's poem. Sappho's passion for Phaon surrendered the artist to time, to what Bloom would call "the universe of death." But the miraculously regenerate Sappho of Donne's poem has the imaginative power to abstract Philaenis' perfection from time's tyr-anny. In Donne, Sappho's falling in love with Phaon was a falling out of love with herself and, by extension, a temporary artistic suicide. On the other hand, a return to Lesbian love, conceived by Donne as a kind of transferred autoeroticism, is central to Sappho's revivification as an artist.

John Donne knew the arduous reservation exacted of ardor by poetry, a reservation equally required of the *tenerorum lusor amorum* and of the exemplar of *saeva indignatio*. With Ovid he understood that *carmina proveniunt animo deducta sereno* (Poetry comes fine-spun from a mind at peace, *Tr.* 1.1.39), and with Juvenal he might well have asserted that *vatem egregium anxietate carens animus facit* (A soul lacking in anxiety makes a superb poet, 7.53). So he did what was necessary for Sappho: *Materiem felicem in carmina praebuit* (He gave her the pleasant material for poetry).[18] The result was Donne's Sappho *rediviva: Provenerunt causa carmina digna sua* (Poetry came forth, songs worthy of their cause).

But what can we surmise of Ovid's own views on the poet's dilemma? The nineteenth-century attack on Ovid's lack of "sincerity" relies on charges not entirely devoid of truth. This from a French school text of the period:

> Ovid wrote a book of love poems without being in love, a mythological poem without understanding mythology [*sic*]; a poem on national themes without the inspiration of a Roman spirit; and a collection of elegiac plaints without the impulse of genuine feeling.[19]

But, as T. F. Higham has argued, the hostile inference that usually follows from those charges is almost entirely without foundation. It reads:

> His sole attachment is to smart society. It is this which he celebrates in the poems of his youth. On this he models his pictures of Greek and Roman antiquity in his *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti*; and his removal from that society is the cause of his grief in the Poems of Exile.[20]

Beginning with the intuition of Gilbert Murray (itself too extreme) that "Ovid seems hardly to have lived at all except in his imagination," Higham marshals the massive evidence from Ovid's poetry that Ovid's ambitions were artistic, his pleasures stylistic, his values aesthetic, and his preferred habitat the world of poetry. Ovid's real reply to Augustus, Higham concludes, was not *Tristia* 2 but the arrogant, if unhappy, letter to Perilla: "Let Augustus take what he can, my country, my

[18] Cf. Ovid, *Amores* 1.3.19–20.
[19] Quoted by T. F. Higham, "Ovid: Some Aspects of His Character and Aims," *CR* 48, no. 3 (July 1934), p. 106.
[20] Higham, "Some Aspects," pp. 114–15.

home, my friends, but: *ingenio tamen ipse meo comitorque fruorque. / Caesar in hoc potuit iuris habere nihil* [My mind is nevertheless my comrade and my joy. Caesar could have no right over this, *Tr.* 7.47–48]."

Ovid knew himself and was eccentric enough to make a virtue of his presumed defects and a *cause célèbre* of his necessity. Thus it would be rash to attempt to deduce too much sincerity from the complaints of lost powers in the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*, especially in the light of the poet's own warning: *Exit in immensum fecunda licentia vatum, / obligat historica nec sua verba fide* (The creative wantonness of poets comes forth without measure, and does not trammel its utterance with history's truth, *Am.* 3.12.41–42). It would seem idle to enquire very deeply into the authenticity of Ovid's lamentations. His laments from exile appear too often to have been ghostwritten by the very women he had created years before in the *Heroides*. His mode was always duplicity, and he more than any other Augustan was an adept at creating a fictive self through disingenuous protestations of artless naiveté. If he believed his own complaints, it was quite possibly only because *abeunt studia in mores*. To the ancients, as well as to their modern inheritors, it was distinctly *studia*,[21] a convention almost as strong as the assertion of the poet's immortality, that overwhelming grief impaired the poetic process. Sappho herself had written: οὐ γὰρ θέμις ἐν μοισοπόλων οἰκίᾳ / θρῆνον ἔμμεν' οὔ κ' ἄμμι τάδε πρέποι (It would be wrong for us. It is not right for mourning to enter a home of poetry, fr. LP 150).[22] Grief is the taint of mortality, and poets escape time's tyranny.

[21] In Aristotle's remarks on the universality of poetry (as opposed to history) in *Poetics* 51a36, the notion that is implicit, I think, is that the poet rises above the facts of his experience. As Aristotle's subsequent remarks show, this does not mean that poets do not feel or enter imaginatively into the feelings of characters they create (*Poetics* 55a22). But even here, Aristotle urges the distinction between the poet and the madman who is, by definition, at the mercy of his feelings. Horace's famous dictum, "If you would have me weep, you must first feel grief yourself" (*Ars Poetica* 1.2.104), is presented in opposition to the notion that technique without charm (the ability to move the listener) is sufficient for poetry. He does not suggest either that feeling is sufficient or that feeling should dominate the creation of a poem. On the contrary, emotion is a necessary, and ancillary, adjunct to *ars*. And even Longinus, despite his emphasis on vigorous emotions, cites Nature as the great paradigm of *designed* vehemence (in his second chapter).
[22] The texts of Sappho quoted in this chapter are from *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta*, ed. Edgar Lobel and Denys Page (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), referred to here as LP. Translations of the fragments of Sappho given in the text are taken from *Sappho*, trans. Willis Barnstone (New York: Anchor Books, 1965). The more literal and accurate translations offered in the notes are taken from the Loeb Classical Library, *Greek Lyric*, vol. 1, trans. David A. Campbell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982). Campbell translates LP 150: "For it is not right that there should be lamentation in the house of those who serve the Muses. That would not be fitting for us." He adds the note: "Metre and therefore text uncertain." Campbell, *Greek Lyric*, p. 161.

This nexus of ideas was indeed so alive for Ovid that it seemed to him appropriate to suggest, in lines as fabulously wrought as any he ever made, that even Homer's art would have been sacrificed had the poet been forced to endure the kind of human pain Ovid came to know in exile:

carmina proveniunt animo deducta sereno;
  nubila sunt subitis tempora nostra malis.
carmina secessum scribentis et otio quaerunt;
  me mare, me venti, me fera iactat hiems.
carminibus metus omnis obest; ego perditus ensem
  haesurum iugulo iam puto iamque meo.
haec quoque quod facio, iudex mirabitur aequus,
  scriptaque cum venia qualiacumque leget.
da mihi Maeoniden et tot circumice casus,
  ingenium tantis excidet omne malis. (*Tr.* 1.1.39–48)

Poetry comes fine-spun from a mind at peace; my
days are clouded with unexpected woes. Poetry
requires the writer to be in privacy and ease; I am
harassed by the sea, by gales, by wintry storms.
Poetry is injured by any fear; I in my ruin am always
and forever expecting a sword to pierce my throat.
Even the making of such verse as this will surprise
a fair-minded critic, and he will read these verses
with indulgence, however poor they are. Bring me
the Maeonian [Homer] and cast just as many dangers
about him; all his genius will fall away in the
presence of such great ills.

Each of the first three couplets contrasts the firm theoretical certitude of the hexameter (enhanced by polyptoton) with instances, in the pentameter, of the turbulence of the world. Such artistry dares us to take the poet's subsequent lament seriously. We are fools if we believe his hypothetical *iudex aequus*. But what is important here is the last couplet. It reformulates the convention after the Homeric example, thus artfully reversing the process of the first three couplets. That reversal signals at once the completion of the idea and the supposed finality of the poet's despair. The last line closely resembles a much disputed line in *Heroides* 15,[23] one framed by a similar context:

[23] Vincent of Beauvais, in *Spec. Hist.*, vol. 6, ch. 107, in a list of "flosculi" quotes

Nunc vellem facunda forem! dolor artibus obstat,
  ingeniumque meis substit omne malis.
non mihi respondent veteres in carmina vires;
  plectra dolore tacent, muta dolore lyra est. (195–98)

I wish I were eloquent now! Sorrow checks my art
  and all my genius is halted by my grief.
My old power for poetry will not come at my call;
  my plectrum is sorrowing and silent, sorrow has hushed my
    lyre.

If doubts about the strength of the frame of reference within which Ovid works were to persist, another example should suffice to dispel them:

nec tamen ingenium respondet ut ante
  sed siccum sterile vomere litus aro.
scilicet ut limus venas excaecat in undis
  laesaque suppresso fonte resistet aqua.
pectora sic mea sunt limo vitiata malorum
  et carmen vena pauperiore fluit. (*Pont.* 4.2.15–20)

Yet my talent does not answer the call as
of old, for I am furrowing a barren shore with
an ineffective plough. Surely just as silt
clogs the veins in springs and the outraged
water halts in the choked fountain, so my
mind has been injured by the silt of misfortune,
and my verse flows with a scantier vein.

The couplet which completes this passage in Ovid's luxuriant dejection ode, another and bolder reference to Homer, is so characteristically Ovidian in its wit and audacity that while it caps the argument of the passage, it almost precipitates a reversal of the intended meaning: *si quis in hac ipsum terra posuisset Homerum, / esset, crede mihi, factus et ille Getes* (If anyone had set in this land Homer himself, let me assure you, even he would have become a Gete, *Pont.* 4.2.21–22).

the line as *ingenium nimiis deficit omne malis*. If Palmer's reading of the line is accepted, the problem then is with *substit*. What does it mean? Palmer suggests that "the metaphor may be from a river's flow being checked," comparing Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.87: *Tibris . . . tacita refluens ita substitit unda*.

There was nothing in his tradition to allow Ovid to dwell at greater length upon the unsightly spectacle of Homer become a brutish Gete. But there was another metamorphosis that he could take almost as far. Legend had found it, romance ennobled it, and comedy degraded it. It was the divine Sappho turned into a failure, Sappho turned too human for words.

In the ancient conception, music, *harmonia*, and poetry, the song of the lyre's *disposita nerva*, presupposed a certain so-called classical harmony, balance, and degree in their chosen instrument: the musician or the poet. The consequences of that presupposition were clear, and the thought became a poetic convention. "Take but degree away, untune that string, and hark, what discord follow! Each thing meets in mere oppugnancy." The post-Romantic poets' preoccupation with the "oppugnancy" of life and art, instinct and order, time and creation, is in part a permutation of that early convention—although so inclusive an issue, one relying so fundamentally on a conception of man and hence philosophy, cannot be assigned solely to the province of poetic theory. However, if one chose to be willful, one might, with Wallace Stevens, counter even that disclaimer with the reply that on the contrary, ". . . a more severe, / more harassing master would extemporize / subtler more urgent proof that the theory / of poetry is the theory of life."

Even before his exile, Ovid exhibited strong interest in the classical convention of the artist's necessary *personal* removal from the excessive claims of life, and of his own common humanity. He had, after all, taken that same convention to an extreme it was never meant to go. Who is Corinna, and what is she? *Felix materia* for poetry and *causa digna*, little more. Besides, the "classical sensibility" was not his métier. Ovid, perhaps even more than other Roman poets of his period, was preoccupied with the apparitions guarding the gates to the now almost inaccessible confines of *aurea mediocritas*. Ovid's interest in the *Heroides*, and especially in the *Metamorphoses*, was no less in the curious condition of the souls haunting the borders and extremities of those confines. But it was not their dubious chances of rescue that mattered. It was their pathology, their banality, their fumbling grotesqueries, their rhythm—the comic rhythm of life's insatiate feeding on life. And among those entrapped souls he found one who once was, and who most should have been, exempt: Sappho, "all fire and air." Ovid, writing of Sappho's fall into the fury and mire of human veins with sympathy and with malice, not only toys with the convention of artistic distance but strengthens it in the direction of its modern appearance: the instantiation of Life as Love.

2 ❀ *Sappho*

Ecquid, ut adspecta est studiosae littera dextrae,
  protinus est oculis cognita nostra tuis—
an, nisi legisses auctoris nomina Sapphus,
  hoc breve nescires unde movetur opus?
foristan et quare mea sint alterna requiras
  carmina, cum lyricis sim magis apta modis.
flendus amor meus est—elegiae flebile carmen;
  non facit ad lacrimas barbitos ulla meas. (1–8)

Tell me: with your first glance at this learned and passionate
    hand,
  did your eyes instantly tell you it was mine?
Or if you had not read the name of the writer, Sappho's name,
  would you fail to know from whose hand this brief letter
    came?
And perhaps you will ask why I write in elegy's rhythms
  when my sure gifts lie in the lyric mode.
This love of mine demands tears: elegy is the music for pain.
  No lyre can fit its intervals to my grieving.

Of all of Ovid's heroines, only one other begins her letter with a question—Paris' Oenone, the medicinal and fiery nymph of the Phrygian forests who knows that often the best attack on infection is a proper incision: *Perlegis? an coniunx prohibit nova? perlege. non est / ista Mycenea littera facta manu* (Do you read this? Or does your new bride stop you? Read it. / This is no letter written by a Mycenean hand, 3.1–2). Sappho's question has no such cutting edge. Kirfel calls the opening of *Heroides* 15 "kunstvoll" and writes, "Ovid is here toying with the naming of a name, since he has the letter begin with three questions and clothes the name of the letter-writer in the second question."[24] Kirfel is, of course, quite right. Ovid is *kunstvoll*, artful. But should one say the same of Sappho? Her questions raise the larger questions of her art and her identity in a manner both complicated and programmatic.

The opening to Sappho's epistle is mannered, precious, and amusing.

[24] For a summary of Kirfel's remarks and an examination of the problem of the missing prose prescripts, I am indebted to an article by Albert R. Baca, "Ovid's Epistle from Sappho to Phaon," *TAPA* 107 (1971), pp. 32–34. Kirfel's remark is from "Untersuchungen zur Briefform der Heroides Ovids," *Noctes Romanae* 11 (Bern, 1969), pp. 102–4.

It almost reads as a parody of the Callimachean literary apology, a parody become a convention of the Latin *recusatio* theme and one frequently employed elsewhere by Ovid, especially in his elegiac role as *tenerorum lusor amorum*. And as is often the case in Latin elegy, the literary apology raises the question of literary decorum. Thus far, then, the opening is truly Latinate. Yet the sense of the lines unerringly advises us that this is a literary curiosity. The *alterna carmina* of the hexameter and pentameter are the index of a commensurate alteration in the person of Sappho the poet. "Would you know me if I didn't sign my name?" she asks, seeming to suggest the answer "No, I am not at all what I am." Such a beginning would obviously be comic if only for the reason that it brings to the surface the thought the reader would otherwise charitably suppress, and suppress precisely because this heroine, unlike Ovid's other Greek women, is a Greek writer: "Sappho writing Latin elegy? Preposterous."

But the incongruity of Sappho's speech goes deeper. In an unwarranted defense of the genre, she makes a literary mistake, a mistake made especially possible by the anachronistic framework of the poem: *flendus amor meus est—elegiae flebile carmen; / non facit ad lacrimas barbitos ulla meas* (7–8).

That Sappho must turn to elegy to compose her *lacrimas* is the first and surest indication that Ovid had no intention of scaling the heights of imitation, however Latin or ambitious his attempt. More important, however, is the form of Sappho's defense of elegy. It presumes the classical or Horatian notion of the subordination of the instance to the genre. Yet Ovid's Sappho, naturally and anachronistically, misunderstands elegy, or what Latin elegy had come to be, or what Ovid had made of elegy. She voices the strategy that Ovid toyed with in all his *Heroides*, to make of erotic elegy an arch and atavistic exercise in a genre that had lost its originally plaintive purpose and meaning. Thus Sappho's protestation of decorum is undermined by its very formulation. She is made to seem at odds with herself, at odds with poetry, and caught in time.

Ovid's jest at Sappho's expense is not merely incidental to this singular and calculated event. John Fyler, speaking of the *Metamorphoses* in his chapter on the "limitations of genre as an ordering principle," has argued quite persuasively the larger and characteristic significance in Ovid's witty defiance of the generic imperative:

> Human beings are always inadvertently outwitted by time in the poem's Pythagorean world, where formal structures inevitably collapse. Unstable by nature, such a world makes decorum impossible.

> Change and decay rule without context. . . . What we might call Ovid's poetics confirms his poetry's treatment of experience. Poetry itself, as a human construct, has difficulty in establishing a stable structure.[25]

Fyler's remarks are relevant in another way to Ovid's Sappho. He argues that Ovid's pervasive skepticism makes itself manifest equally in the treatment of individual characters as in the organization of the entire *Metamorphoses*:

> Ovid characteristically portrays a character belatedly trying to adapt to the demands of his new external form. Io's half-comic plight (1.635–38) is typical:
>
> illa etiam supplex Argo cum bracchia vellet
> tendere, non habuit, quae bracchia tenderet Argo.
> et conata queri mugitus edidit ore
> pertimuitque sonos propriaque exterrita voce est.[26]

Ovid's strategy in the programmatic opening of *Heroides* 15 is scarcely different. Sappho too, *conata queri* (attempting to lament) and almost *propria exterrita voce* (frightened by her own voice), is revealed in the awkward process of metamorphosis, belatedly trying to adapt her art to the new demands of a genuinely *flendus amor*, a passion requiring sorrow.

What are Sappho's chances in the adjustment of art to grief when at best their equilibrium is hazardous and uneasy, a result of the artist's necessary truce between poetry and experience? Under Ovid's scrutiny no such truce survives, and the breaking of it occasions no little degradation for the poet Sappho. Speaking of the *Ars* and the *Remedia*, Fyler writes:

> Ovid shows the persistence of passion in the human temperament, and he views sceptically the possibility of controlling passion by encompassing it in a rational framework. . . . A little passion, to be carefully imposed, is thus necessary. But once admitted, the rustic *barbaria* of the libido causes the pretense of systematic strategy to collapse.[27]

[25] John Fyler, "Chaucer's Poetry and Its Ovidian Contexts" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1971), p. 9.
[26] Fyler, "Chaucer's Poetry," p. 8. [27] Fyler, "Chaucer's Poetry," p. 20.

Similarly, Sappho's strategy of the *flebile carmen* (weeping strain) collapses. The strict decorum of elegiac tearfulness gives way and is recovered only sporadically within the poem. She burns:

Uror, ut indomitis ignem exercentibus Euris
fertilis accensis messibus ardet ager.
arva, Phaon, celebras diversa Typhoidos Aetnae;
me calor Aetnaeo non minor igne tenet.
nec mihi, dispositis quae iungam carmina nervis,
proveniunt; vacuae carmina mentis opus! (9–14)

I burn, I burn like the rich field ablaze with its harvest of fire,
while the winds from the East, masterless, fan the flames.
Far away are the fields of Aetna: your presence there assigns
them to fame:
but a heat no less intense than Aetna's devours me here.
And no poems come to me, come to life, no songs I can marry to
harmony
with the strings of the lyre: poetry is work for a mind at rest.

The "flame of love" became, for the subsequent tradition, the signature of Sappho's poems:

ἦλθες, ἔγω δέ σ' ἐμαιόμαν,
ὂν δ ἔψυξας ἔμαν φρένα καιομέναν πόθῳ· (fr. LP 48)

You came, and I was longing for you;
you cooled my heart
which was burning with desire. (trans. Campbell)

Her flames burned even more extavagantly as later writers gilded the image with the contrivance of novelty. Plutarch, for example, compares Sappho to the fire-spitting son of Hephaistos:

ἄξιον δὲ Σαπφοῦς παρὰ ταῖς Μούσαις μνημονεῦσαι· τὸν μὲν γὰρ Ἡφαίστου παῖδα Ῥωμαῖοι Κᾶκον ἱστοροῦσι πῦρ καὶ φλόγας ἀφιέναι διὰ τοῦ στόματος ἔξω ῥεούσας· αὕτη δ' ἀληθῶς μεμιγμένα πυρὶ φθέγγεται καὶ διὰ τῶν μελῶν ἀναφέρει τὴν ἀπὸ τῆς καρδίας θερμότητα 'Μούσαις εὐφώνοις ἰωμένη τὸν ἔρωτα' κατὰ Φιλόξενον.
(*Amat.* 762F)

It is fitting to mention Sappho along with the Muses. The Romans speak of how Kakos, son of Hephaistos, let fire and flames flow out of his mouth. And Sappho's words are truly mixed with fire, and through her songs she brings out her heart's warmth, and according to Philoxenos heals the pain of love with the sweet-voiced Muse.

But Horace, characteristically, recalls to life something of Sappho's blazing serenity:

spirat adhuc amor
vivuntque commissi calores
Aeoliae fidius puellae. (*Odes* 4.9.10–12)

the Aeolian girl and her love still breathe,
and her passions are alive, entrusted to the music
of the lyre.

Ovid's Sappho, however, burns far differently from either Plutarch's or Horace's. Her fire is not entrusted (*commissi calores*) to the lyre, nor do her songs transform pain with healing warmth. Her fire extinguishes the fertility of fields ready for the harvest. Yet it is like the fire of Aetna, subterranean and confined; it consumes and suppresses poetry. The couplet which follows Ovid's radical permutation of the conventional *ignes amoris* (fires of love) similes ties the two comparisons together and completes his introduction to the metamorphosed Sappho. Poetry relies on order (*dispositis nervis*, 13–14), but Sappho's fires are fanned by lawless winds (*indomitis exercentibus Euris*, 9). Her poems do not ripen and grow (*provenientis* is linked to *fertilis* and conventionally suggests the produce of the fields, as in *proventus*) because poetry presupposes the rule of the free *mens vacua* (14), and Ovid's formulation amounts to a reduction of the convention. Yet Sappho is only midway in her metamorphosis into "passion's slave." Still seeing with a poet's sight, she is afflicted with the artist's tendency to side with the beauty that destroys hearts. *Arva, Phaon, celebras*: "You give poetry, Phaon, to the fields. You make them worthy of song." Sappho's longing for Phaon makes poetry impossible; but without him poetry cannot occur: ἀλγεσίδωρον, μυθοπλόκον (frs. 172, 188: Campbell). Thomas Mann's paraphrase of the philosopher's warning to Phaedrus offers an illuminating parallel to Sappho's plight:

"For beauty, my Phaedrus, beauty alone, is lovely and visable at once. For, mark you, it is the sole aspect of the spiritual which we

can perceive through our senses, or bear so to perceive. Else what should become of us, if the divine, if reason and virtue and truth, were to speak to us through the senses? Should we not perish and be consumed by love, as Semele aforetime was by Zeus? So beauty, then, is the beauty-lover's way to the spirit—but only the way, only the means, my little Phaedrus."[28]

Sappho is, as Socrates would say, enamored of the means to poetry. She is lost on the way.

3 ❀ *Phaon*

Phaon is in one way the least vivid male figure in all of Ovid's *Heroides*: he *says* nothing at all. Most of the heroines report at least a few words from their men, such as the line spoken by Demophoon to the elegant and reflective Phyllis, with all the liquidity and grace of Snug the Joiner: *Phylli, fac expectes Demophoonta tuum.* (Phyllis, see to it you wait for your Demophoon, 2.98). Nor is it reported that Phaon has really done anything. He has merely left Sappho. He has no history, no clearly delineated or (as in other poems) misunderstood character, no motives, no ambitions. Phaon is merely, and consummately, beautiful. This beauty of his occasions most of the moments in the poem in which Sappho herself is cruelly caricatured, for the preternatural loveliness of Phaon is usually described within the context of Sappho's own ugliness. Sappho's too lavish raptures would degrade *her* quite naturally, but she persists in carrying them to the extreme of quite conscious self-degradation:

candida si non sum, placuit Cepheia Perseo
  Andromede, patriae fusca colore suae.
et variis albae iunguntur saepe columbae,
  et niger a viridi turtur amatur ave.
si, nisi quae facie poterit te digna videri,
  nulla futura tua est, nulla futura tua est. (35–40)

If I am not fair, yet Perseus found Cepheus' Andromeda fair to look on,
  and tawny-dark, with the dusk color of her home.

[28] Thomas Mann, "Death in Venice," in *Thomas Mann, The Collected Stories*, ed. A. Hill (London: Mercury Books, 1961), p. 68.

And doves of white are sometimes mated with others of different hue,
  and the green bird loves the black turtle-dove.
If, unless her beauty appears worthy of your own, no woman
  will belong to you, then not one will ever be yours.

Sappho's logic wears painfully thin. After all, even if Phaon were forced by definition to be content with someone less beautiful than he, he need not be content with someone unbeautiful in the extreme, the equivalent to a *niger turtur*. More than that, there is something innately repugnant on which Ovid capitalizes in the spectacle of Sappho's so material and physical infatuation, the crazed eroticism she lavished upon so indifferent and so immaterial a character as Phaon. Because the occasion of her excess is so blank, her excess seems the more extreme; it seems desperate.

Phaon is youth and beauty and sex: *Est in te facies; sunt apti lusibus anni* (You are beautiful; your years are ripe for the pleasures of love, 21). Yet he is not simply that. He is supremely that, the incarnate idea of it all. He is thus one crux from which emanates Ovid's duplicitous treatment of Sappho the infatuated matron, abhorring and resisting her own decline, and Sappho the poet, fallen too hard in love with life. If the character of Phaon is thin, it is luminously thin. His loss entirely dominates the rhetoric of the poem.

The Phaon of *Heroides* 15 is neither man nor boy:

o nec adhuc iuvenis, nec iam puer, utilis aetas,
  o decus atque aevi gloria magna tui,
huc ades inque sinus, formose, relabere nostros!
  non ut ames oro, verum ut amere sinas. (93–96)

O you, not yet a man, no longer a boy—the perfect years,
  your time's chief ornament and the glory of your age,
come to me, my lovely, sail back into the havens of my embrace.
  I beg you, not begging for your love, but that you permit my loving you.

He is a limbo of possibility, the visible and timeless material of creation awaiting mythic transformation: *sume fidem et pharetram—fies manifestus Apollo; / accedant capiti cornua—Bacchus eris* (Take up a lyre and quiver: you are Apollo embodied and alive. Let horns appear above your brow, and Bacchus appears: he is you, 23–24). We are

not convinced. Phaon resists becoming either artist or artifact, as the two lines above demonstrate beyond a doubt. Indeed, Ovid makes him less Michelangelic marble than a nude male model ineffectually flexing his props. Phaon remains unregenerate, discomposed: *efficite ut redeat; vates quoque vestra redibit. / ingenio vires ille dat, ille rapit* (Bring him back; your singer too will return. He gives power to my genius: he takes it away, 205–6).

4 ❀ Four Seminarrative Passages

If the subject of *Heroides* 15 is, in the large, the failure of poetry, it must still be conceded that Ovid's poem is a victory of conscious craft over its subject. It is no shallow victory. Nothing could be more misleading than Purser's remark in his introduction to Palmer's edition of the *Heroides*:

> It was a pity, though perhaps inevitable, that Ovid should have thought fit to represent Sappho to a considerable extent as the New Comedy had chosen to caricature her, rather than as Sappho who was on the one hand the poetess all fire and air, and on the other the Lesbian lady who made her dignified reply to the advances of Alcaeus. (P.xxii)

Ovid's epistle is neither predominantly New Comedy caricature, nor idealization, nor faithful recreation of the Sappho of her own poems. Ovid throughout creates a daring reunification of the discordant facts of the poetry, the legend, and the comic tradition, while ignoring or avoiding the implications of no single aspect within the contradictory and disharmonious range of the portrait. With a capacious retrospective glance, he reinterprets the legend in the light of the literary convention of Horace's *vacui cantamus* and in the light of his own understanding of human psychology. He creates, as it were, an etiology of degeneration. By means of an exquisitely manipulated fabric of allusion to Sappho's own life as *she* described it and as it was subsequently described in legend, he makes of his Sappho a true shadow of her lost self.

Ovid understood and exploited *varatio* not only as an instrument of verbal embroidery but also as a principle of poetic structure. I shall limit the further discussion of *Heroides* 15 to an examination of the four successive narrative or seminarrative scenes which follow upon Sappho's lengthy *misericordia*: (1) Sappho's public humiliation before her brother Charaxus (107–22); (2) her description of her erotic dreams

(123–34); (3) her account of her frenzied coursing through the caves and forests that were the arena of her affair with Phaon (137–56); and (4) her account of her meeting with the Naiad at the *fons sacer* (157–80). Each of these scenes is composed at a different stylistic level. Each casts a different light upon the figure of Sappho. Each is composed with a different order of poetic sympathy for, or alienation from, the subject, Sappho. Yet each section acts on the complicated ethos of Sappho as it was established in her *misericordia* in the first half of the poem. And each section is evocative of Sappho's own poetry in a manner at least suggestive, so that despite the really radical alterations in poetic light and coloring, the figure of Sappho remains undisfigured, whole, a convincing voice. It is a human voice that cannot relax, a voice maddened by *Peitho*, Persuasion, daughter of Aphrodite.

Per tibi—qui numquam longe discedat!—amorem,
  Perque novem iuro, numina nostra, deas,
cum mihi nescio quis "fugiunt tua gaudia" dixit,
  nec me flere diu, nec potuisse loqui!
et lacrimae deerant oculis et verba palato,
  adstrictum gelido frigore pectus erat.
postquam se dolor invenit, nec pectora plangi
  nec puduit scissis exululare comis,
non aliter, quam si nati pia mater adempti
  portet ad exstructos corpus inane rogos.
gaudet et e nostro crescit maerore Charaxus
  frater, et ante oculos itque reditque meos,
utque pudenda mei videatur causa doloris,
  "quid dolet haec? certe filia vivit!" ait.
non veniunt in idem pudor atque amor. omne videbat
  vulgus; eram lacero pectus aperta sinu. (107–22)

I swear by my love for you—may my love stay close forever—
  and by the nine goddesses whose will is my own,
I swear that when someone said to me "Your happiness is
    escaping"
  for a long time I was unable either to cry or to speak.
My eyes had no tears, my tongue no words,
  a clear chill gripped my heart.
When my grief had discovered itself, I was lost to shame:
  I beat my breast, tore my hair, and I wailed aloud, violently,

much like a loving mother whose son has been taken from her
  when she carries his vacant form to the tall pyre.
My brother, Charaxus, takes pleasure in my grief and, swollen
  with joy of it, walks back and forth before me, and then,
in order to degrade its cause, says
  "Why should she cry? Her daughter is still alive."
There is no agreement between modesty and love. The entire
    town was watching;
  I tore open my dress, and I tore my naked breasts.

Sappho swears that when she first heard of Phaon's desertion she could neither weep nor speak. But then, when her "grief found itself," she beat her breasts and defiled her hair like a mother forced to carry the body of her dead young son to the pyre: *non aliter quam si nati pia mater adempti / portet ad exstructos corpus inane rogos* (115–16). At first glance, this passage seems rather anonymous. It seems to deserve the double censure so often leveled at the *Heroides*: that they are exercises in school rhetoric tricked out into poetry; and that numerous passages from different poems are monotonously interchangeable, such as descriptions of excessive grief, fainting fits, jealousy, and longing. One might even argue more specifically that Ovid only mechanically adjusts this type-scene to Sappho's condition by having her swear by Phaon and by her Muses, and that he concludes it only mechanically with the conventional elegiac rationale for such open or covert instances of feminine hysteria: *non veniunt in idem pudor atque amor* (121). Similarly Phaedra, the theoretician of lawless and sophistic erotic art, writes *dicere quae puduit, scribere iussit amor* (Love commanded me to write what I was ashamed to speak, 4.10).

It is true certainly that descriptions of emotional states were, in school rhetoric, conventionally embodied in first-person descriptions of erratic demeanor, dress, and behavior. The *persona* of the *suasoria* describes his or her condition objectively, as though simply looking on; the more extravagant the behavior, the more credible, presumably, the emotion. It is also true that since the heroines all grieve extravagantly, at some point in their missives they all describe their own extravagant behavior. One most extreme and athletic example is Ariadne's reaction when she finds Theseus' side of the sleeping bag empty:

excussere metus somnum; conterrita surgo,
  membraque sunt viduo praecipitata toro.
protinus adductis sonuerunt pectora palmis,
  utque erat e somno turbida, rapta coma est. (10.13–16)

ut vidi haut dignam quae me vidisse putarem,
  frigidior glacie semianimisque fui. (10.31–32)

Fear shook the sleep from me. Terrified I rise
  and my body is hurled out of my widowed bed.
Immediately I beat my breast with my palms
  and tore my hair, just as it was, tangled from sleep.

When I saw the sight I thought I had not deserved to see
  I grew colder than ice and became only half alive.

Sappho's description of her own behavior is indeed highly conventional, yet it has one rather disturbing note. When other heroines grieve for their lost lovers, as parents grieve for their dead children, the *tertium comparationis* is the equivalence in feeling, not in fact. But Ovid's simile undercuts the near-monotony. He directs our attention to the disastrous similarity in fact, not feeling. Sappho is, after all, old enough to be Phaon's mother, and her love is anything but maternal. The next four lines, playing on Sappho's simile, make Ovid's perverse preciosity all too clear (117–20). Phaon never speaks in the poem, but Charaxus, Sappho's brother, does; and his mordant and cruel witticism, tainted with the acid of authentic human speech, is the more effective for being a displaced lover's one-liner. But Charaxus' cruelty precipitates another reversal: it makes Sappho seem, especially within the wide public context of brothers, child, friends, and *omne vulgus*, more alone than ever. When Ovid merely lets Sappho go too far (e.g., *pia mater*), we take malicious pleasure in her unconsciously revealing hyperbole. But when another character in the poem draws blood, deriving from Sappho's pain a selfish and private satisfaction, we discover iniquity in him and fine her, finally, pathetic.

What are the cause and the effect of Charaxus' so complacent mockery of his sister? Why is his satisfaction so great? His sarcastic *quid dolet haec? certe filia vivit* (120) affords the most chilling line in the poem. Its glacial irony must be understood within the context of their old family quarrel about reputation, money, and inappropriate love, a quarrel in which Charaxus now has the upper hand. His malign supremacy increases (*crescit*) not merely by Sappho's grief (*maeror*) but by her degrading transformation. And it is a transformation to which we are meant to respond. We are not meant to conceive of Sappho, I think, as undiscriminating, utterly promiscuous, or even unwholesomely licentious. Nor—should we recall the legend—are we to conceive of her own earlier indignation at Charaxus' affair with

Doricha as a manifestation of mere class hatred, financial acuity, or family pride. For Sappho's poems contain frequent and persuasive appeals to moral and social decorum, one of them particularly relevant for these passages. In rejection of a younger lover, Sappho had written:

ἀλλ' ἔων φίλος ἄμμι
λέχος ἄρνυσο νεώτερον·
οὐ γὰρ τλάσομ' ἔγω συνοί-
κην ἔοισα γεραιτέρα. (fr. LP 121)

Even if you love me, find
a younger woman. I could
never bear to share my bed
with a man younger than I.[29]

Moreover, as the fragments show, Sappho expressed a great deal of maternal affection for her daughter Cleis, the child who, in Ovid's poem, is reduced to but one of the many cares leading up to the finale of Sappho's catastrophe.

Charaxus' cruel witticism must be considered within the widest possible context, a context readily available to Ovid and to Ovid's literate audience. So considered, it forces us to confront not only the degraded spectacle of the woman as she is now but also her alteration from what she once had been. By drawing from both sides of the ancient debate surrounding the life and morals of Sappho, and by indirectly summoning to mind the discordant "testimony" of Sappho's own poetry, Ovid creates a coherent image of a woman in the process of degradation, a stable image of instability.

The succession of the passages discussed above is an instance of the complex tonal instability which pervades the poem. Sappho's simile degrades her. She becomes momentarily and simply foolish. But when our own tendency for mockery becomes explicit in Charaxus' insult, we are summoned to a larger and yet more sympathetic objectivity. Sappho is indeed in thralldom to the kind of inappropriate love for which she had once ridiculed her brother. Overwhelmed by her loss, she is now vulnerable to his vengeful irony. But she is a consummately appropriate target for it, and hence her sudden pathos, our sudden sympathy. She is a woman betrayed by her own convictions—a woman become, as Benedick says in *Much Ado about Nothing*, "the argument of her own scorn."

[29] "But if you are my friend, take the bed of a younger woman, for I will not endure being the elder one in a partnership." Trans. Campbell, *Greek Lyric*, p. 143.

Tu mihi cura, Phaon; te somnia nostra reducunt—
somnia formoso candidiora die.
illic te invenio, quamvis regionibus absis;
sed non longa satis gaudia somnus habet
saepe tuos nostra cervice onerare lacertos,
saepe tuae videor supposuisse meos;
oscula cognosco, quae tu committere linguae
aptaque consueras accipere, apta dare.
blandior interdum verisque simillima verba
eloquor, et vigilant sensibus ora meis.
ulteriora pudet narrare, sed omnia fiunt,
et iuvat, et siccae non licet esse mihi. (123–34)

I can only think of you, Phaon. My dreams bring you back to me—
dreams more intense and dazzling than radiant day.
I find you in those dreams, although you are worlds away.
But sleep offers pleasures too brief to satisfy.
Often it seems that your arms are holding the weight of my neck,
often I seem to be holding your head in my arms,
the kisses are familiar, those kisses, tongue to tongue, I recognize them,
the kisses you used to take and give back to me.
Sometimes I caress you, and say words that seem utterly real,
and my lips are awake, responsive to all that I feel.
I hesitate to say what happens next, but it all happens,
there's no choice, just joy, and I'm inundated with it.

There are two passages in *Heroides* 15 (41–50, 123–34) which by virtue of their explicit sexual candor are unique in the collection and perhaps even unique in the Ovidian opus (the possible exception being *Amores* 3.7, the poet's hilarious lament on his own impotence). Indeed, these passages have seemed to some scholars, most notably O. Gruppe (*Minos* 491), so out of place in the *Heroides* that they alone have been considered sufficient to discredit the authenticity of the entire epistle. Other scholars have not taken their objections quite so far. P. Lieger asked *Num credibile est ipsum Ovidium eandem puellam finxisse paucis versibus post nimis fere pudicam?* (Can we believe that Ovid himself, a few verses later, made the same woman almost too chaste?). His final conjecture is that the poem is really Ovid's own but that it

was *a posteriore quodam retractum et auctum* (revised and expanded by some later writer).[30]

The vacillation in the portrait of *ethos* to which Lieger objects is characteristic of Ovid's treatment of Sappho throughout the poem. Nonetheless, Lieger's question is valid and encourages speculation. One question we must ask is why such explicitly erotic passages turn up in the Sappho epistle and not in the letters of other heroines. After all, some of them are, like Sappho, no longer *pudicae puellae* and hence also subject to the attitude voiced in the *Ars Amatoria* that mature women are good prey precisely for their felicitous combination of experience and desperation. Furthermore, it is a commonplace of Ovidian scholarship on the *Heroides* that "declamation roars while passion sleeps." Yet Palmer saw in these passages unexpected traces of what critics habitually seek in the *Heroides* but rarely seem to find to their satisfaction: authenticity, passion awake. Commenting cautiously but fairly, he wrote that Sappho's letter "is the only epistle which exhibits real passion, though it is a passion more of a physical than a romantic kind" (p. xxii). Palmer's judgment facilitates a further refinement of our question. Why should Sappho, of all the heroines, be afflicted by an infatuation so obviously and even predominantly carnal?

Pausanias wrote, laconically and with an unerring eye on the truth, Σαπφὼ δὲ ἡ Λεσβία πολλά τε καὶ οὐχ ὁμολογοῦντα ἀλλήλοις ἐς Ἔρωτα ᾖσε (Sappho sang many contradictory things about love).[31] But Paulus Silentarius ventured a deeper and not entirely willful appraisal of those contradictions:

> μαλθακὰ μὲν Σαπφοῦς τὰ φιλήματα, μαλθακὰ γυίων
>   πλέγματα χιονέων, μαλθακὰ πάντα μέλη,
> ψυχὴ δ' ἐξ ἀδάμαντος ἀπειθέος· ἄχρι γὰρ οἴων
>   ἔστιν ἔρως στομάτων, τἄλλα δὲ παρθενίης.
> καὶ τίς ὑποτλαίη; τάχα τις, τάχα τοῦτο ταλάσσας
>   δίψαν Ταντaλέην τλήσεται εὐμαρέως.[32]

Sappho's kisses would be sweet; sweet the embraces of her snowy thighs and sweet all her body. But her soul is of unyielding adamant. For her love stops at her lips and the rest she keeps

[30] The objections of both Gruppe and Lieger are quoted in Baca, "Ovid's Sappho to Phaon," p. 36.
[31] Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 9.27.3.
[32] Paulus Silentarius, *Palantine Anthology* 5.246.

virgin. And who can stand this? Perhaps one who could take this could easily endure the thirst of Tantalos.

I think it can be conjectured that Ovid might well have shared Silentarius' view. To the author of the *Amores*, the gulf between lyric license and real life was familiar terrain. But Silentarius' Sappho the Poet is not Sappho the Woman of *Heroides* 15. Ovid's all too carnal Sappho, the libertine Sappho of the gossip, the scandals, the legend, and the comedies, became for him an occasion for the poetic exploration of the conventional notion of necessary "artistic distance," the notion on which Horace relied to create the images of stunning silence (*parum decoro silentio*) in the last lines of *Odes* 4.1. There is, moreover, the possibility that one of Sappho's own poems, as well as the debate which surrounded her name in antiquity, may have led Ovid to combine causally the themes of sexuality and poetic impotence, and to suggest, as he does in *Heroides* 15, that such enslavement to the senses meant the end of poetry for her.

While it is not my purpose to comment at length on the first explicitly erotic passage (41–50), it is important to note that there, as elsewhere in the poem, Sappho speaks as though she knew what history would say of her: "The beautiful Sappho: Socrates liked to call her thus because of the beauty of her song, though she was small and dark."[33] Sappho disastrously equates her sexual identity with her identity as a poet and her capacities for speech, succumbing to the belief that for the world, as well as for the poet and the philosopher, poetic illusion, deeper than literal truth, can dominate and even supplant literal truth:

> At mea cum legerem, sat iam formosa videbar;
>   unam iurabas usque decere loqui.
> cantabam, memini—meminerunt omnia amantes—
>   oscula cantanti tu mihi rapta dabas.
> haec quoque laudabas, omnique a parte placebam—
>   sed tum praecipue, cum fit amoris opus,
> tunc te plus solito lascivia nostra iuvabat
>   crebraque mobilitas aptaque verba ioco,
> et quod, ubi amborum fuerat confusa voluptas,
>   plurimus in lasso corpore languor erat. (41–50)

But once I seemed beautiful enough, when I read my poems to you.

[33] Maximus of Tyre, 24.18.7.

You swore that—alone among women—I took grace always
from the words I spoke.
I would sing, I remember . . . lovers remember it all . . .
As I sang, you returned me my kisses, kisses stolen while I
sang.
You would praise them, too, and in all ways I was pleasing to
you,
but especially then, when we practiced the art of our love.
Then, more than ever, my wanton play delighted you,
my constant motion, my observances of delight,
and, with the body's exhaustion, that languor beyond languor in
us both,
after that final, fine confusion of our desire.

It is not wholly unusual to find *apta verba ioco* inserted in so precise a list of the stages of the *opus amoris*, yet although we find a similar allusion to aural excitement elsewhere in Ovid,[34] its presence here has a special significance. Sappho's words seem to appeal to Phaon as much as her *crebra mobilitas*. It is her own singing that Sappho remembers, and the kisses of her lover stolen from her singing mouth.

Our second seminarrative passage, Sappho's account of her erotic dreams (123–34), is a literal permutation of a sentimental refrain quite common with the heroines in their moments of most chastened humility: *non ut ames oro, verum ut amere sinas* (I beg you, not begging for your love, but that you permit my loving you, 96). But Sappho's manipulation of the *topos* is counterpersuasive and counterrhetorical. It is clear that she does not really require Phaon. She requires her dream, her idea of him. In her dream she *creates* Phaon quite to her satisfaction (*omnia fiunt*), and in addition, she rediscovers her poetic vocation intact: *blandior interdum verisque simillima verba / eloquor, et vigilant sensibus ora meis* (131–32). She is the old Sappho once again, the autoerotic poetess of John Donne's poem, her imagination asserting its superiority to reality. Like a poet, she prefers, and exacts, *variatio*; she has *ars: saepe tuos nostra cervice onerare lacertos, / saepe tuae videor supposuisse meos* (127–28). Throughout the poem, Ovid reminds us mercilessly of the defects of Sappho's physiology. But at least in her dreams, Sappho puts her limitations of stature to good use. Her height facilitates one of the epic postures unavailable to the statuesque Andromache:

[34] *Ars Amatoria* 3.796: *nec taceant mediis improba verba iocis.*

Parva vehatur equo: quod erat longissima, numquam
Thebais Hectoreo nupta resedit equo. (*Ars. Am.* 3.777–78)

Let a small woman ride horseback: because she was very tall, the Theban bride never sat astride Hector's horse.

Sappho ends coyly, on a remarkably familiar note (*ulteriora pudet narrare*) but then, to our surprise, does not allow her modesty to censor one of the most explicitly lubricious lines in the Ovidian corpus: *sed omnia fiunt, / et iuvat, et siccae non licet esse mihi* (133–34).

Commentators compare this passage to *Amores* 3.7, but only because of its candor with regard to its subject. The treatment of the subject, I suggest, is best compared to *Amores* 1.5, *aestus erat*, which ends on a note quite as coy as *ulteriora pudet narrare*:

Singula quid referam? nil non laudabile vidi
et nudam pressi corpus ad usque meum.
cetera quis nescit? lassi requievimus ambo;
proveniant medii sic mihi saepe dies. (*Am.* 23–26).

Why list each separate detail? I saw nothing not worthy of praise, and I pressed her naked body to my own. Who doesn't know the rest? Exhausted, we lay in repose. May I have many noondays such as this one!

Amores 1.5 sheds light on the question of the relationship between Sappho's eroticism and her poetic identity. Ovid's description, which progresses no less methodically than Sappho's through the conventional stages of the *opus amoris*, is, if more amplified, scarcely more credible. As he playfully informs us, it is not Corinna who provided his recreation, but *medius dies*, the time for naps and fantasies, even dreams. The final line, which seems to be a periphrasis for "And may Corinna come to me again some times at noon," can be read quite literally. Corinna, like Phaon, is scarcely more than a necessary and convenient adjunct to the poetic fancy. But in *Amores* 1.5 the *tenerorum lusor amorum* awakens with an urbane and moderate request for more such fictions. Sappho, on the other hand, who once welcomed her dreams and found in them myths as strong as truth, awakens to lament that her dreams of Phaon, like Phaon himself, *tam cito me destituisse*. Because fictions are inadequate for her, she, by a curious reversal, is inadequate for them. *Ingenio vires ille dat, ille rapit.*

The progression of these two scenes—from the almost mock-elegiac hyperbole of Sappho's grief to the false-erotic, brief satisfaction of her dream—is resolved in a third scene in which the parody of passion seems to become a passion seriously described and charitably conveyed. Relying more strongly than before on *topoi*, if not specific references, from Sappho's own poetry, the scene of Sappho's frenzy in the forest seems to include a lyric sympathy unprecedented in the poem. Its almost benevolent evocation of Sappho's emotion is independent, for once, of malicious witticisms pointing toward the incongruities of her condition. We are permitted, briefly, a singular vision, one unharassed by wit, by innuendo, by Ovid's countersight.

Commenting ironically on one aspect of Sappho's poetry, Denys Page writes, "If we now enquire about Sappho's experiences of epiphany, we find nothing more remarkable about them than their frequency." In attempting to assess the relative religiosity or conventionality of Sappho's interviews with Hera, Aphrodite, Hermes, or other gods, he warns:

> Nor must we too hastily assume that Sappho's conversations with the gods are purely fictitious, the products of convention and art. There were various channels, such as dreams or the prophet's inspiration, by which invisible divinity conveyed its messages to mortals.[35]

Ovid's *Heroides* 15 can be read as an extended appeal for an epiphany, although in this case the *numen* invoked is, unhappily, mortal and no longer interested in providing the *felix materia* of Sappho's art. Having first irreverently transformed one conventional medium of divine intervention, the traumatic vatic trance, into a wet dream, Ovid then sends Sappho into the forests and groves, yet another conventional Sapphic locale for epiphany. She finds the place but not the beauty of it, for *dos erat ille loci* (he [Phaon] was the dower that made it rich, 146).[36] There, in lines more lyrically suggestive than any other in the poem, *conscia natura* shares her loss:

[35] Denys Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 41.

[36] *Dos* is a post-Augustan usage which Palmer accepts: "It might puzzle one to find a place in English literature where 'wealth' in this sense is applied to a person, and yet it does not strike one as forced usage" (Palmer, *Heroides*, p. 423). However, Cornelissen suggested that *dos* might be a mistaken copying of *flos*. His idea is attractive, and I prefer his reading to Purser's, for the following reason: of all the conventional beauties of the *locus amoenus* which, for Sappho, are dissipated by Phaon's absence, one in particular is absent—flowers. *Flos* loci abest.

antra nemusque peto, tamquam nemus antraque prosint—
  conscia deliciis illa fuere meis.
illuc mentis inops, ut quam furialis Enyo
  attigit, in collo crine iacente feror.
antra vident oculi scabro pendentia tofo,
  quae mihi Mygdonii marmoris instar erant;
invenio silvam, quae saepe cubilia nobis
  praebuit et multa texit opaca coma—
sed non invenio dominum silvaeque meumque.
  vile solum locus est; dos erat ille loci.

Cognovi pressas noti mihi caespitis herbas;
  de nostro curvum pondere gramen erat.
incubui tetigique locum, qua parte fuisti;
  grata prius lacrimas conbibit herba meas.
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. (137–56)

I seek out the caves and the woods, as though they were any use—
  but woods and caves shared in the secret of my delights.
I rush there wildly, maddened, like one whom frantic Bellona has touched,
  my hair loosened, falling about my shoulders.
I look at the caves, at the coarse stone of their arches,
  that had once seemed like Lydian marble to me;
I come upon the forest that offered us many times
  the bed we lay upon, and whose abundant boughs covered us in darkness.
But I do not find the master, the forest's lord, and mine. The place
  is only impoverished earth; his presence was the grace that endowed it.

I recognized the grass, pressed down, of the familiar hollow
  our bodies made in the blades on the green remembered bank.
I lay down and touched the place, the part in which you lay.
  The earth that once delighted me was thirsty and drank in my tears.

Even the branches have cast off their leaves; they seem to mourn;
the birds are quiet; none make their dear lament.
Only the nightingale, only Philomel, whose terrible grief took
vengeance
most terrible against her husband, laments for Itys her son.
The nightingale sings of Itys, her abandoned love is Sappho's
song:
Only that; all else is as silent as the dead of night.

It is not by accident that Ovid sends a deranged Sappho coursing into the caves and groves of the countryside. Caves are a favorite setting for the erotic escapades of the Alexandrian poets. And the grove into which Sappho wanders, and stays, has an even more extensive literary history. The *locus amoenus* of erotic poets and of lovers, it lacks none of the conventional seductions of such places: a tree which affords shade, protection, and even secrecy, when required; other trees whose rustling leaves create melodious counterpoint to the sweet song of birds (often nightingales); a clear and sometimes musical spring; grass for the lovers' bed; and a local or universal *numen* (spirit) prepared to share what even Lucretius claimed as the most precious, if jealously guarded, jewel of the gods—tranquility.

Yet the grove into which Ovid's Sappho wanders has a more specific literary past: the real Sappho was no stranger to it. The particular associations of the grove derive chiefly from one lengthy fragment of Sappho's poetry. It is likely that Ovid knew this particular poem well. It is, moreover, probable that in this narrative section, and in the beginning of the next (157–62), he makes use of its literary reverberations to shed light on Sappho's situation. This fragment is the invocation to "Aphrodite of the Flowers":

δεῦρύ μ' ἐκ Κρήτας ἐπ[ὶ τόνδ]ε ναῦον
ἄγνον, ὄππ[α τοι] χάριεν μὲν ἄλσος
μαλί[αν], βῶμοι δὲ τεθυμιάμε-
νοι [λι]βανώτῳ·

ἐν δ' ὔδωρ ψῦχρον κελάδει δι' ὔσδων
μαλίνων, βρόδοισι δὲ παῖς ὀ χῶρος
ἐσκίαστ', αἰθυσσομένων δὲ φύλλων
κῶμα κατέρρει·

ἐν δὲ λείμων ἰππόβοτος τέθαλεν
ἠρίνοισιν ἄνθεσιν, αἰ δ' ἄηται
μέλλιχα πνέοισιν [
[ ]

ἔνθα δὴ [. . .] ἔλοισα, Κύπρι
χρυσίαισιν ἐν κυλίκεσσιν ἄβρως
ὀμμεμείχμενον θαλίαισι νέκταρ
οἰνοχόαισον. (fr.2: Campbell)

Leave Crete and come to this holy temple
where the pleasant grove of apple trees
circles an altar smoking with frankincense.

Here roses leave shadow on the ground
and cold springs babble through apple branches
where shuddering leaves pour down profound sleep.

In a meadow where horses graze
and wild flowers of spring blossom,
anise shoots fill the air with aroma.

And here, Queen Aphrodite, pour
heavenly nectar into gold cups
and fill them gracefully with sudden joy.[37]

Sappho's poem summons Aphrodite from Crete to a theophany in a grove which houses a spring and trees whose boughs rain down slumber: *koma*. Ovid's grove, similarly, has a spring: *est nitidus vitroque magis perlucidus omni / fons sacer* (157–58), and this spring houses not Aphrodite but one of her attendant Naiads. Ovid's grove similarly has encouraged slumber: *invenio silvan, quae saepe cubilia nobis / praebuit et multa texit opaca coma* (143–44). But while Sappho's forest is awake with the sounds of spring, the running stream, and leaves sounding in the winds, Ovid's grove is silent but for the lamentations of Sappho and the nightingale, and the grasses do not drink the moisture of the brook but drink instead Sappho's tears. The *koma* of the Greek poem is the most important word for our purposes. It is an extraordinary usage. According to Page:

> In each of the few places it is used in early poetry, it means not simply "sleep" or "deep sleep" but "sleep" (or "deep sleep") induced

[37] "Hither to me from Crete to this holy temple where is your delightful grove of apple-trees, and altars smoking with incense; therein cold water babbles through apple-branches, and the whole place is shadowed by roses, and from the shimmering leaves the sleep of enchantment comes down; therein too a meadow, where horses graze, blossoms with spring flowers, and the winds blow gently . . .; there, Cypris, take . . . and pour gracefully into golden cups nectar that is mingled with our festivities." Trans. Campbell, *Greek Lyric*, p. 57.

> by enchantment or other special or supernatural means. It is not natural sleep, but a kind of trance or coma artificially induced. . . . Here in Sappho it is obviously not the natural sleep of a tired person, but a state of trance or coma induced by the sound of the water and the rustling leaves.[38]

But it is clear, I think, that the word *koma* has associations with *art*. Appropriately enough, in Pindar the word is used to describe the power of music (*Pyth.* i, 6ff.), and in Homer the word is used to describe Penelope's sleep, a slumber in which the Goddess Athene composes a new Penelope, now transcendently beautiful and youthful. Sappho, then, may use the word to refer to the more or less magical state imparted both by the ambiance of the place and its preternatural beauty to the mind of the poet receptive to a theophany, to the occasion of poetry. But in Ovid's poem, the trees which so often offered the lovers a couch and covered them in deep shade (*opaca coma*—is there a chance that *coma* may be an oblique glance at Sappho's *koma*?) are now barren, and silent too: *quin etiam rami positis lugere videntur / frondibus, et nullae dulce queruntur aves* (151–52). The beauty and transcendence are dissipated. The suggestion here is that what Aphrodite was to the lyric poet, Phaon became, though is no longer, to Ovid's Sappho. He was an erotic substitute for vatic intensity, an understudy, an apprentice not to the imperishability of artifice but to time, change, and decay.

In *Heroides* 15 Sappho becomes driven, like Ovid's other heroines, to find sustenance in memories. But she is too distracted by *peitho* to be anything but skeptical (in Sapphic anadiplosis and Ovidian chiasmus) of her chances: *antra nemusque peto tamquam nemus antraque prosint* (137). The hills, brooks, and holy places are there, as they were, but no birds sing. Sappho herself takes part only in the now sinister song of the nightingale, and she contemplates only her own present ruin. The *locus amoenus*, which as T. G. Rosenmeyer says "in the pastoral . . . normally insure[s] a full savoring of love, even if it is disappointed or abortive love," has become a *locus vilis*. Sappho has lost the strength to resist the riot of her passions, the strength to rescue her impressions, through detachment, for poetry.

Ovid's treatment of Sappho's silvan lament is his most ambitious attempt to correlate the excess of emotion with the extinction of poetry. (That this is accomplished within the framework of a dramatic soliloquy which is itself verse of no paltry order is a measure of his

[38] Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus*, p. 37.

poetic powers.) Sappho has lost the transforming power of her artistry; the real impinges too grossly upon her vision: *antra vident oculi scabro pendentia tofo, / quae mihi Mygdonii marmoris instar erant* (141–42). But the failure of the poetic prerogative to coerce reality is, in the remainder of the passage (143–56), evoked by means of a poetic device which relies, ironically, on imaginative distortion and deformation of the real—a use of personification so extreme as to be called a pathetic fallacy. Appropriately enough, it is the device conventionally employed in classical poetry, with varying degrees of tact and restraint, to describe the lamentation of nature at the death of poets. It is elsewhere employed by Ovid, with calculated, categorical abandon, to embroider on the death of Orpheus, the poet who descended to Hades once because *posse pati volui nec me temptasse negabo: / vincit Amor* (I have desired strength to endure, and I will not deny that I have tried to bear it. But love has overcome me, *Met.* 10.25–26). Orpheus descended unwillingly to Hades the second and final time because, having learned his lesson too well, he scorned the god.

The pathetic fallacy is rarely employed by Ovid with more than a casual or playful side-glance. There are no other instances in Ovid's poetry in which it becomes the decisive or even culminating structural factor in the design of an extended sequence. There is certainly no other example of a fictive character employing the device with any shaping rigor. And it is not to be found in the extant fragments of Sappho's poetry.[39]

How does Ovid use the device, and why? Returning to the forest, Sappho discovers that the *locus amoenus* has become a *vile solum*, a slough of despond. The fragile and ideal security of the poet's grove has been encroached upon by the vicissitudes of time, nature, and human anxiety. Sappho finds the old imprint of their bodies in the familiar grass, and the grass, *grata prius*, now hungrily drinks, not dew as before, but her tears. The trees, too, are in mourning. They have discarded their finery, as Sappho has hers: *ille mei cultus unicus auctor abest* (78). The birds are deprived of their habitual sweet complainings not less than Sappho is, for whom *plectra dolore tacent, muta dolore lyra est* (198). Only the nightingale cries for her child, *sola virum non ulta pie maestissima mater* (153), as Sappho has cried

[39] I do not mean to suggest, as Page does, that there is virtually no connection or dependence between Sappho's feelings and her descriptions of nature. Philip Damon, *Modes of Analogy in Ancient and Medieval Verse*," U.C. Publications in Classical Philology, vol. 15, no. 6 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 280, writes: "An 'invisible harmony,' a subjective meaning behind the physical facts, emerges from both the description of nature and the description of absence. The image and the lyric emotion become, in Longinus' phrase for Sapphic unity, *en ti soma*, one organic whole."

for Phaon, *non aliter, quam nati pia mater adempti* (115). Although it is midday, the forest is midnight-still: *ut media cetera nocte silent* (156). Its quiet is of a different order than the pastoral noon. Nature and the very time of day are distorted, their natural functions usurped, to keep company with Sappho's feeling.

As Rosenmeyer has argued in his book on Theocritus and the Pastoral, Ruskin's famous strictures on the pathetic fallacy do not often apply to its use in classical poetry. With copious examples he demonstrates and rightly concludes:

> Fortunately these philosophical scruples need not worry us much. The fact is that good pastoral poetry features considerably less in the way of anthropomorphisms than is sometimes assumed.

Speaking of Theocritus, he continues:

> In the Idylls, the externality of nature is taken at face value; nature is a population of creatures and beings each with a standing of its own. Further the poet edges in the setting and companions of the singer with so light a touch that a humanization of their role could only vulgarize the picture.[40]

But if Ovid's tact in this instance is not so great as Theocritus', neither is it as great as Horace's or Vergil's. Are we then to assume that Ovid's treatment of grieving nature at one with the grieving poet is pedantic (however evocative it may be), the result of his proverbially heavy touch, his proverbial vulgarization of principles of decorum? I think not.

Ovid knew the boundaries of decorum in the use of personification quite well, even when he trespassed upon them. His treatment of the Procris and Cephalus episode in the *Ars Amatoria* offers sufficient evidence of that. Here too the setting is the pastoral *locus amoenus* (*Ars Am.* 3. 687–94) turned *locus vilis* by a woman, like Sappho, *mentis inops* (684). (Interestingly, the details of scenery in this passage correspond to a great degree with those of *Heroides* 15.) Cephalus is overheard amorously apostrophizing the wind, and Procris, when told of this, thinks he has taken a lover and plans a voyeuristic appraisal of their next meeting. But when she discovers the fallacy of Cephalus' "affair," Procris incautiously rustles the weeds in joy. Her husband fallaciously takes her for a deer, and reenacting his wife's instinctive

[40] T. G. Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 202.

suspicions by similarly mistaking the distinction between man and nature, he shoots her, discovering too late his pathetic mistake. Thus Ovid's epyllion, though it (like the related passage in *Heroides* 15) has moments of pathos and true *dolor* incongruous within the *Ars Amatoria*, seems to incorporate a witty reminder of the dangers in a too liberal indulgence of the pathetic fallacy.

Just as Ovid's description of the death of Orpheus is a conspicuous use of overkill in conscious parody of a *topos* (*Met.* 6.41–49), Sappho's silvan lament is a near profanation, more delicate but quite as deliberate, of the convention. What, then, does Ovid hope to accomplish?

In the description of the dying Daphnis in Theocritus' first Idyll, the animals lament, but Daphnis neither compels that lament nor acknowledges it. He does not dissolve into the landscape, but remains at a remove, its master. When Cypris maliciously prods him and spitefully lets him know that his death is a payment for thinking he could escape love unscathed, he replies with undiminished pride, in a ferocious assertion of his own identity, that "even in Hades he will be a strong grief to love." Rosenmeyer comments, "Daphnis, one feels, remains great in death because he does not remit the rights of his differentness." But "remit the rights of her differentness" is precisely what Ovid's Sappho does do. In her case, one demonstrably atypical in classical poetry, Ruskin's scruples, however indebted to his own idiosyncrasies and the tastes of his time, seem to apply. Ovid's Sappho is *mentis inops*. Her state of mind is the state of mind of the author of the lines pilloried by Ruskin:

> "The cruel, the crawling foam": Foam does not crawl, neither is it cruel; the state of mind which attributes to it these characteristics of a living creature is one which is unhinged by grief.

Sappho is like Ruskin's "second-rate poet," "the man who perceives wrongly, because he feels, and to whom the primrose is anything else than a primrose." She does not resort to the fallacy "validly," as Ruskin's "inspired poets" do—poets who are strong, "submitted to influences stronger than themselves" and yet "ever aware of the fact out of which strong feeling comes."

Sappho's use of the pathetic fallacy is meant to be, I think, what Ovid calls his own poetry in the *Tristia*: an *index malorum*. She is trapped in the excesses of her feeling and argued into distortion by persuasion. She perceives wrongly because she feels too deeply. She cannot muster the detachment by which feeling too becomes fact, the facts of poetry. The landscape dominates her soul, tactlessly. Once

again, Ovid's tone is blurred, unstable, its ambivalence exacting. Sappho's perceptions are exaggeratedly funereal: she creates an untrustworthy image of the world, a world no longer real in itself but a reflection of her internal annihilation. Yet at the same time that we judge her perceptions distorted, we find her emotion compelling. It compels our sympathy for the consciousness it engulfs.

The fourth and last narrative passage (157–84) operates on a new and different level of poetic sympathy. Sappho, handmaiden of the Muses, friend and familiar of Aphrodite, and protégé of Apollo, becomes the plaything of the gods, and the style allows us to observe her confusion at a considerable remove. The passage is famous, debated, and curious. It offers a problem of considerable moment. Aphrodite does not appear to Sappho; instead, one of her attendant Naiads, *una Naias*, materializes before the weeping poet, who has thrown herself in exhaustion and despair on the ground near the *fons sacer*. It is, to some readers, slightly disturbing that a Naiad appears to Sappho. It is Aphrodite who is expected in the Sapphic ode to which (according to Palmer, Purser, and DeVries) this passage alludes. Yet Aphrodite was, after all, a sea goddess (among other things), and Lesbos was one of the few cult centers of her attendant Nereids and Naiads (see Farnell, *Cults*, pp. ii, 636ff.). Nevertheless, her absence suggests her recent alienation from Sappho, and the expected epiphany is, as a consequence, somewhat twisted. The Naiad offers Sappho only an equivocal consolation: the expectation of a dubious tranquility. She recommends that Sappho try the "Leucadian Leap," that she let Ambracia's waters extinguish her *ignes non aequos* (163). She then gives a suspicious exemplum of the efficacy of this expedient:

hinc se Deucalion Pyrrhae succensus amore
misit, et inlaeso corpore pressit aquas.
nec mora, versus amor fugit lentissima Pyrrhae
pectora, Deucalion igne levatus erat.
hanc legem locus ille tenet. pete protinus altam
Leucada nec saxo desiluisse time! (167–72)

From here Deucalion, aflame with love for Pyrrha,
hurled himself down and struck the water unharmed.
Instantly that love for Pyrrha escaped his stubborn heart:
Deucalion was released from the fire of love.

It is the law of that place. Go now, find the cliff
of high Leucas, and do not be afraid to leap.

The problem, of course, is that nowhere else in the extant classical literature is there the vaguest suggestion that that model couple ever had marital (or premarital) problems, much less that Deucalion resorted to so vivid a therapeutic cure.

Some scholars have deduced from this bizarre allusion to a universally unknown myth the inauthenticity of the Ovidian authorship of the epistle. But Palmer hoists them, quite validly, on their own prejudices:

> With regard to objection (5) touching the legend of Deucalion here presented, it seems to be, if properly considered, an argument *for* the Ovidian authorship of the poem. For it is much more likely that Ovid, who was steeped in Alexandrine lore, should have introduced this legend than that an imitator of Ovid would have had the courage to do so. Imitators are a timid "servum pecus," original poets bold. (P. 423)

Birt ingeniously invented some "Alexandrine lore" to fill the gap. He suggests that the Alexandrians "tried to explain the name Leucadion from a metathesis of the letters in Deucalion and unearthed or invented this myth connecting Deucalion with Leucadia" (Palmer, p 434). And he further urges the view that Ovid drew his Alexandrine lore from a specific Alexandrine source, the *Aitia* of Callimachus (*Rh. Mus.* 32, pp. 339, 430ff., quoted by Palmer, p. xxii). Dilthey offers in substantiation of that hypothesis the suggestion that "perhaps in the temple at Mytilene a lyre may have been shown to travellers as that of Sappho, and a story may have gathered round it which was related in detail by Callimachus" (*Cydippe*, p. 118, n. 1, quoted by Palmer, p. xxii). Yet the argument from etymology and the hypothesized allusion to Callimachus, though attractive, are unsubstantiated in fact. More important, they fail to explain why Ovid would, at this juncture in the poem, exploit a legend so disturbingly at odds with the predominant tradition, especially when he usually offers an idiosyncratic, characteristically neoteric slant on myths, not an eclipse of them. Since we do not have Callimachus' treatment of the myth, it seems judicious to look for the clues to Ovid's treatment where we can best discover them: in his extensive treatment of the Pyrrha and Deucalion story in the *Metamorphoses* (1.313–415).

Ovid's treatment in the *Metamorphoses* of this paradigm of conjugal stability is not without levity, and at times borders on the farcical. Pyrrha and Deucalion are *hominum exempla* (366), and they are described as flat, like the patterns they are, paper cutouts caricaturing human aspirations and the intrepid human will to survive. They combine the religiosity, sentimentality, and suspiciousness of petit bourgeois fundamentalist shopkeepers. Once safely on land, Deucalion romanticizes his survival. His style betrays a musty tinge of evenings behind the cash register relieved by Vergilian *florilegiae*. He obviously relishes the contemplation of his wife's dependence upon him:

> quis tibi, si sine me fatis erepta fuisses,
> nunc animus, miseranda, foret? quo sola timorem
> ferre modo posses? quo consolante dolores!
> namque ego (crede mihi) si te quoque pontus haberet
> te sequerer, coniunx, et me quoque pontus haberet.
> (*Met.* 1.358–62)

> What would be your feelings, now, poor soul, if
> the fates had willed that you be rescued all
> alone? How would you bear your fear, alone? who
> would console your grief? For be assured that if
> the sea held you also, I would follow you, my
> wife, and the sea should hold me also.

When he adds as an afterthought that of course he would not have gone on without her (*crede mihi*), we wonder.

Pyrrha herself is nothing short of comic when taking Themis' oracle literally, she refuses to propagate the human race for fear of outraging her dead mother's bones. In the face of the extenuating circumstances, her priorities are, without question, regressive. And when the two of them finally hit, with some difficulty, on a less inconvenient interpretation of the goddess' words, they are still reluctant, *adeo caelestibus ambo / diffidunt monitis* (so distrustful are they both as to the heavenly command, 396–97). But they resolve to accomplish the oracle anyway, with circumspect bravado, for one reason alone: *Sed quid temptare nocebit?* (There's no harm in trying, 397).

If we look to this passage in the *Metamorphoses* (putting aside the question of the date of composition) for clarification of the Naiad's oracular advice in *Heroides* 15, we find a study in glaring contrasts. Pyrrha and Deucalion can scarcely be said to demonstrate poetic flair. They are literal-minded in the extreme (*nos duo turba sumus*: We two

are the [entire mortal] throng, 355). Despite their avowed piety, they are intractably suspicious of the gods. The comparison encourages speculation. One wonders if the human race would have been regenerated if to accomplish it Pyrrha and Deucalion had been advised to throw, not stones over their backs, but themselves from a cliff into the receding flood. They surely would not have responded to that injunction with *sed quid temptare nocebit?* Their credulity has a distinctly low threshold.

But Sappho trusts the Naiad as well as the Themis (*lex*) of the white cliffs: *hanc legem locus ille tenet* (It is the law of that place, 171). Her credulity is, it would seem, too naive; perhaps it is even mistaken. The words of gods are often ambiguous. The Naiad's oracular advice is ambiguous too, for Sappho, alive or dead, will be *levata igne* (released from the fire of love, 170). Yet the exemplum of Deucalion encourages Sappho, falsely, to hope for life. And surely this exemplum, so far diverging from the expectations and presuppositions of Ovid's own audience, is suspicious. It is even, I suggest, intentionally deceptive.

Although not technically an oracle, the advice of the Naiad shares the conventional oracular ambiguity of divine admonitions and divine apparitions, an ambiguity derived from the caprice of the gods, who as often condemn their human clients as rescue them. The question then raised is, What quarrel do Phoebus and Aphrodite have with Sappho that they should thus mislead her or neglect her in her pain? The answer follows from Ovid's treatment of Sappho throughout the poem. Phoebus is no longer Sappho's patron: she has, however involuntarily, lost her poetic vocation and will dedicate her lyre to death. Aphrodite, like her attendant Nereids and Naiads, has both a benign and a vengeful side. Sappho herself called *Peitho*, Aphrodite's daughter (frs. LP 90, 200). And Sappho knew (and Ovid must have remembered from Theocritus) that Aphrodite was both the erotic poet's familiar and his nemesis:

> ἦνθέ γε μὰν ἁδεῖα καὶ ἁ Κύπρις γελάοισα,
> λάθρη μὲν γελάοισα, βαρὺν δ' ἀνὰ θυμὸν ἔχοισα,
> κεῖπε "τύ θην τὸν Ἔρωτα κατεύχεο, Δάφνι, λυγιξεῖν·
> ἦ ῥ' οὐκ αὐτὸς Ἔρωτος ὑπ' ἀργαλέω ἐλυγίχθης;"
> (Theocritus, *Id.* 1.95–98)

> Yes, and Cypris came too, with a sweet smile,
> smiling duplicitously, repressing her heavy anger,
> and she said, "Surely, Daphnis, you vowed to give Love a fall,
> but haven't you yourself been thrown by cruel Love?"

Sappho believes the Naiad because she has lost her perspective on the complications of myth (which is invoked by the Naiad without proper decorum) and on the fragile contingencies of divine alliances. She is the target of a tragic joke, a joke made possible by her facile credulity and enhanced by the Ovidian preciosity in which the Naiad's assurances are packaged. If Sappho is somewhat foolish, she is also, we realize, something else. Yet once again Ovid's tone exacts from the reader no facile, uncomplicated response. She is desperately in earnest, desperately troubled. Cheated of her last hope, yet hoping nonetheless, she composes an elegiac epitaph whose only claim to poetic validity is in the mention of her own name and in the associations that name evokes:

GRATA LYRAM POSUI TIBI, PHOEBE, POETRIA SAPPHO:
CONVENIT ILLA MIHI, CONVENIT ILLA TIBI. (183–84)

SAPPHO THE POET, APOLLO, HAS GRATEFULLY GIVEN HER LYRE
TO YOU:
IT SUITS ME WELL: FOR YOU IT IS FITTING TOO.

Sappho's sepulchral epigram is not provocative Latin poetry. It is worthy neither of Ovid nor of Sappho. But the acute understatement of the last line is, as transition to the finale of the poem, troubling and suggestive. In that one line we confront simultaneously Sappho's extinguished powers and her present fall.

Unlike Daphnis, Ovid's Sappho dies ingloriously, without poetry. The remainder of her epistle is an uncomprehending lament for the death of her gifts and an uncomprehending plea for the restoration of her poetic identity:

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.
Lesbides aequoreae, nupturaque nuptaque proles,
Lesbides, Aeolia nomina dicta lyra,
Lesbides, infamem quae me fecistis amatae,
desinite ad citharas turba venire meas!
abstulit omne Phaon, quod vobis ante placebat,
me miserum, dixi quam modo paene "meus!"
efficite ut redeat; vates quoque vestra redibit.
ingenio vires ille dat, ille rapit. (195–206)

I wish I were eloquent now! Sorrow checks my art
and all my genius is halted by my grief.
My old power for poetry will not come at my call;
my plectrum is sorrowing and silent, sorrow has hushed my
lyre.
Daughters of the island of Lesbos, children married and soon to
be wed,
daughters of Lesbos, your names sung to the Aeolian lyre,
Lesbian women I have loved, and in loving hurt my fame,
do not come crowding any longer to hear my music.
Phaon has stolen everything that once was pleasing to you,
Phaon, alas, I came close to calling him mine.
Bring him back; your singer too will return.
He gives power to my genius: he takes it away.

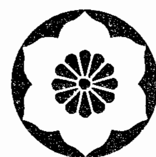
Although her lament is superb Latin poetry, her subsequent fantasy of Phaon's return from across the sea, appliquéd on the conventional *solve ratem* motif of the deserted woman, is gauche, if picturesque. Sappho's fancy, cut adrift from reality, turns banal and foolish. The figure of Phaon as a man is, as always, insubstantial. At best a puppet, at worst a phantom, Phaon recedes into final vacuity behind the elegiac embroidery: *ipse gubernabit residens in puppe Cupido* (Cupid himself will sit as pilot at your stern, 215). Phaon's very vocation is displaced. Cupid becomes the gondolier's gondolier.

Sappho has lost the poet's required balance and detachment. *Non cantat vacua. Non urit levis.* Just as her use of the pathetic fallacy was designed by Ovid as an index of her distortion of nature, and just as her response to the Naiad developed her confusion between myth and truth, once again the signature of Sappho's double vision of love (ἀλγεσίδωρος and μυθόπλοκος) is shown as degenerate and blurred now by human tears. She cannot any longer perceive the factuality of the real, or the falsity of myth.

As human beings so often do in Ovid's poetry, Sappho pursues "like rats that raven down their proper bane, a thirsty evil, and when we drink we die." Life in the form of heterosexual unrequited love, Sappho's proper bane, has its way with her, exacts its final payment. *Abeunt studia in mores.* But Ovid's poem is no *post mortem.* We comprehend Sappho's thirst. Her protrait in *Heroides* 15 is a portrait at times charitable, and at times cruel. Yet it is at all times, unerringly, at once an etiology of a fallen spirit and of a poet's fall.

OVID'S TOYSHOP OF THE HEART:

Epistulae Heroidum



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