

SAPPHO, FRAGMENT THIRTY ONE: THE FACE BEHIND THE MASK

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"That man seems to me to be like the gods, who sits opposite you and hears you near him speaking sweetly

and laughing attractively. But oh, it shakes the heart in my breast, for when I look at you, at once it is no longer possible for me to speak,

but my tongue is broken to silence, and already a subtle fire has run beneath my skin; in my eyes is no vision, my ears are roaring,

a cold sweat pours down me, and trembling seizes all (my body); I am paler than grass and seem almost to be dying . . .

*But anything is endurable, since . . . impoverished . . ."*¹

THE CENTRAL CONTROVERSY about fr. 31 is well-known. Wilamowitz regarded it as a wedding-song (*Hochzeitslied*) sung by Sappho at the wedding feast of a girl who was leaving her *thiasos*. He reconstructs the scene: *Und nun nimmt Sappho das Barbiton und singt ihr Lied, wie sie so viele für die Hochzeiten ihrer Schülerin verfasst hatte, voll von Scherzen, von fescennina jocatio . . . sie hat ja auch für Atthis gesungen . . .*²

For several decades this view prevailed, especially after Snell's confident defense in 1931.³ The simile in line 1, says Snell, is a conventional feature of hymeneal song, the *εἰκάσειν*. Thus Himerius tells us (fr. 105b) that Sappho would liken a bride to an apple, a groom to Achilles or (in a fragment preserved by Hephaistion) to Ares. In lines which, since they were quoted to illustrate metre, were probably the first lines of a poem,

¹For the purposes of this paper there are no significant differences between the texts of Lobel and Page (*Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta* [Oxford 1966]) and of Voigt (*Sappho et Alcaeus* [Amsterdam 1971]). For discussion of the textual problems the reader should consult D. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (Oxford 1955) and M. Manfredi, *Dai Papiri della Società Italiana* (Florence 1965) 16–17. My translation is *exempli gratia*. In line 9 I follow Lobel and Page. Line 12 I translate literally; according to Irwin it means something like, "I am moist with excitement like the new grass in spring" (E. Irwin, *Colour Terms in Greek Poetry* [Toronto 1974] 66). In line 17 I follow West ("Burning Sappho," *Maia* 22.4 [1970] 312). I will not review the problem of line 17 in this paper, but should state that, although the evidence is inconclusive, I am among those who think that there probably was a fifth stanza.

²U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Sappho und Simonides* (Berlin/Zurich/Dublin 1966 [1913]) 58. It is not possible to mention all the literature on this question; I have simply selected the strongest proponents of the arguments. For additional recent bibliography see D. E. Gerber, "Studies in Greek Lyric Poetry, 1967–1975," *CW* 70.2 (1976) 106–115.

³B. Snell, "Sappho's Gedicht *φαίμεναι μοι κῆπος*," *Hermes* 66 (1931) 71–90.

Sappho makes it clear that a simile describing the groom is in order in that position:

τίωι σ', ὦ φίλε γάμβρε, κάλως εἰκάσδω;
δρπακι βραδίνωι σε μάλιστ' εἰκάσδω.

*To what, O dear bridegroom, may I well compare thee?
To a slender sapling I may best compare thee.*

(Fr. 115)

Furthermore, in the description of the wedding of Hector and Andromache (fr. 44) Sappho calls the bride and groom *θεοεικέλοις* ("like gods"). The first line of fr. 31, then, is the traditional *makarismos* of poems celebrating an event in someone's life.⁴

Secondly, Snell implies that *ἄνθρωπος* ("man") with both the definite article and the demonstrative *must* refer to the girl's husband or bridegroom: are we to believe, Wilamowitz had asked, that Lesbian girls of the 7th century sat in social, even romantic proximity with men to whom they were not betrothed?⁵

Sappho's description of her passionate reaction to the girl, then, is praise of the bride, typically indirect or reflected through a witness. It prefigures the erotic delights which the groom is to enjoy. It is not an expression of jealousy, as in Catullus's version. We expect, at the end (i.e., in a fifth stanza), a farewell to the bridal pair, or an invitation to the maidens to sing the *hymenaion*, or something of the sort.

Some parts of this view were attacked by Bowra (in 1936), who nonetheless accepted much. "It is unlikely that *ὄνηρ* means 'the husband', for elsewhere Sappho uses *γάμβρος* for 'husband'; and Alcaeus twice uses *ὄνηρ* contemptuously to mean 'the fellow'."⁶ The simile is not necessarily hymeneal, because the departed girl in fr. 96 thought Atthis like a goddess. The scene *is* a wedding feast (because nowhere else would a girl talk freely with a man), but the song is not a *Hochzeitslied*, that is, it was not performed at the wedding feast. There is need for a fifth stanza.

Setti (in 1939) more determinedly objected to every one of Wilamowitz's and Snell's contentions.⁷ Line 1 *is* a *makarismos*, he says, but not an epithalamic one; those are less emphatic (just a single adjective) and must be conjoined with praise of the bride's beauty. Is it possible that an epithalamium should lack the terms *νύμφα* ("bride") and *γάμβρος* ("groom")? Is it possible that in an epithalamium the *reason* for the groom's happiness would not be stated? In the hymeneal fragments the tone is naive and direct. As for the segregation of the sexes, "The Lesbians," he says, "were not Muslims." On the contrary, one has the

⁴See Snell's examples, *ibid.* 75, n. 3.

⁵*Op. cit.* (above, n. 2) 58.

⁶*Greek Lyric Poetry* (Oxford 1936) 216.

⁷A. Setti, "Sul Fr. 2 di Saffo," *St. It. Fil.* 16 (1939) 195-221.

impression of a possibility of relationships between men and women superior to that in Attica in the classical age.

Oddly, he does not deal with the crux of Snell's argument, that the *makarismos* should be an *εικάζειν*. And his claim that the *makarismos* should be only a single adjective is not impressive. Indeed, Sappho does say, *ὀλβιε γάμβρε* ("blessed bridegroom") (fr. 112), *φίλε γάμβρε* ("dear bridegroom") (fr. 115), and *τίμιε γάμβρε* ("honoured bridegroom") (fr. 116), using only a single adjective for the *makarismos*, but she also says (fr. 111):

*γάμβρος εἰσέρχεται ἴσος Ἄρεϊ
ἄνδρος μεγάλῳ πόλῳ μέζων.*

*The groom comes in like Ares,
much larger than a large man.*

Setti calls this a special case, explaining that the groom was unusually tall. But what of Himerius's statement (fr. 105b) that she would liken the bridegroom to Achilles *and compare him to that hero in his deeds*—which surely requires a number of words? We shall return to this.

Setti's attack weakened the Wilamowitz-Snell position, but it was still believed, for example by Gallavotti in 1942 and Schadewaldt in 1950.⁸ In 1955 Denys Page dealt what seemed to be the death-blow. The Wilamowitz-Snell position, he said, is an attempt to whitewash Sappho's moral character by claiming that her expression of passion was only a conventional praise of the bride.⁹ How could an expression of homosexual passion be appropriate at a heterosexual wedding? "What will the bridegroom make of it? With what pleasure will they listen, 'father and wedding guests', to this revelation of Sappho's uncontrollable ecstasy? . . . There was never such a wedding song in the history of society; and there should never have been such a theory in the history of scholarship." (But Snell *had* commented, "*Für uns ist es befremdlich, dass Sappho vor den Eheleuten so offen von ihrer eigenen Liebe spricht.*"¹⁰)

Since Setti's and Page's attacks, Bowra has reneged on the wedding feast, and even Snell has recanted to the extent of saying the poem was not *performed* at a wedding feast.¹¹ Indeed, some recent commentators treat the *Hochzeitslied* theory as a curiosity of the past. Kirkwood, for

⁸See C. Gallavotti, "Studi sulla lirica Greca," *Riv. di Fil. Class.* 70 (1942) 103–124; W. Schadewaldt, *Sappho* (Potsdam 1950).

⁹*Op. cit.* (above, n. 1) 32.

¹⁰*Op. cit.* (above, n. 3) 83, n. 1.

¹¹*Greek Lyric Poetry*³ (1960) 187, and Snell's *Gesammelte Schriften* (Göttingen 1966) 97. (But Fraenkel in 1961 [*Dichtung und Philosophie*] and Treu in 1968 [*Sappho*] still follow Wilamowitz.)

example, calls it an "absurd misinterpretation" and asserts that it "has been . . . thoroughly demolished by Denys Page, and can confidently be dismissed."¹² The only vigorous attempt to defend the wedding-song theory from Page's "demolition" added little to the existing arguments and has not been influential.¹³

It is with deference to these and other predecessors that I enter this already overlong controversy in an attempt to sort things out a little; neither side, I think, has seen just where its own arguments lead.

First, it is claimed in the Wilamowitz-Snell position that a simile comparing a human to a god is an element of hymeneal song. Setti and Page refute this ("the reasoning hardly deserves refutation," says Page¹⁴) on two points: 1) poets often use such terms on occasions other than weddings, and 2) Sappho herself, at fr. 96.4/5, uses such a phrase on a non-hymeneal occasion.

But the first objection is not documented by either Setti or Page. What other authors do they mean? Words expressing direct comparison with gods (e.g., *θεοειδής*, *θεοείκελος*, *ἴσος θεοῖσιν*) are found principally in early epic, in a few places in Sappho, and in Plato, where they are clearly somewhat ironic. The early lyricists, elegists, and iambists not only do not use them, but are, in some cases, at pains to say so. Alcman, for example, says of Hagesichora at a moment when a *makarismos* is clearly in order, "She is not a better singer than the Sirens, for they are gods" (*Parth.* 96–98.) The exactitude of phrases like, "Akmon, the noblest of the demi-gods" (*Parth.* 7)¹⁵ also suggests that they did not use terms like "equal to the gods" freely. And Simonides's encomium to Skopas (fr. 37) and his *threnoi* quoted by Stobaeus (esp. fr. 18) may be regarded as explanations of this restraint. In brief, comparisons of humans to gods do not exist in Alcman, Alcaeus, Stesichorus, Archilochus, Tyrtaeus, Mimnermus, Theognis, Solon, Ibycus, Anacreon, Simonides, or indeed in any Greek poet of the 7th and 6th centuries except Sappho.¹⁶

Only after Sappho, and only in a poet who seems to have been greatly influenced by her, and only in an erotic context, does anything like her comparisons with gods occur: Ibycus says of his favourite Euryalus "Thou scion of the sweet Graces, darling of the fair-haired Muses, surely Cypris and tender-eyed Peitho nursed you amid blossoms of roses" (fr. 6). But this, of course, is not a direct comparison, and he is probably

¹²G. Kirkwood, *Early Greek Monody* (Ithaca and London 1974) 122 and 259. See also G. Wills, "Sappho 31 and Catullus 51," *GRBS* 8 (1967) 167–197, and G. L. Koniaris, "On Sappho fr. 31 (L-P)," *Philologus* 112 (1968) 173–186.

¹³R. Merkelbach, "Sappho und ihr Kreis," *Philologus* 101 (1957) 1–29.

¹⁴*Op. cit.* (above, n. 1) 31.

¹⁵And cf. Alcaeus B 10.13.

¹⁶Mimnermus (7.7) has *θεῖος Ἰήσων*, but Jason was descended from Prometheus, and

imitating Sappho anyway. When the Archilochus-song at the games gave way to the full-blown epinikion, the possibilities were increased: Simonides says of a boxing victor, "Neither the might of Polydeuces would have lifted hand against him, nor the iron child of Alcmena" (fr. 4). But this is not a direct comparison either. Perhaps it is Pindar whom Page and Setti are thinking of; but even in Pindar such comparisons are apt to be less direct and emphatic:

I have praised the lovely son of Arcestratus, whom I saw conquering by might of his hand beside the Olympian altar in those days, fair in body and touched by that youth which once kept shameless death away from Ganymede, by the power of the Cyprus-born.

(*Ol.* 10.99-106)

Indeed, Pindar often follows Homer in the theological propriety of making descent from the gods a requisite for comparison with them. In any case, it is difficult to see what bearing evidence from Pindar (or the tragedians) could have on Sappho; he did, of course, imitate her (using Aeolic metres in twenty of the forty-six victory odes) and may have generalized into *his* kind of encomiastic song a practice which she had used for different ends in *her* kind.

of course the use of such adjectives for great figures from the heroic age had the epic sanction. Callinus (1.19) is more restrained in the only other passage of this type:

λαῶ γὰρ σύμπαντι πόθος κρατερόφρονος ἀνδρὸς
θνήσκοντος, ζῶων δ' ἄξιος ἡμιθέων
ὥσπερ γὰρ πύργον μιν ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ὀρῶσιν.

*"When a brave man dies there is regret in all the people,
and while he lives he is comparable to a
demi-god, for in their eyes he is like a tower . . ."*

And Tyrtaeus (la col. 4 [6]) says:

τοῖς ἱκελοὶ Ἥρης αἰδοίης, εὖτ' ἂν Τυνδαρίδαι

"Like them of august Hera . . . when the Tyndaridae . . ."

but the *primum comparationis* is unknown. The irony of Theognis's "godhood" in these lines (337-340) is apparent:

Ζεὺς μοι τῶν τε φίλων δοῖη τίσιν οἷ με φιλεῦσιν
τῶν τ' ἐχθρῶν μείζον, Κύρνε, δυνησαμένων.
χοῦτως ἂν δοκέοιμι μετ' ἀνθρώπων θεὸς εἶναι,
εἰ μ' ἀποτείσασμενον μοῖρα κίχοι θανάτου.

*"Zeus grant me repayment for the friends who love me
and for the enemies who have been stronger, Kyrhus, than
I; and then I will seem to be a god among men, if,
when the lot of death comes for me, all
my debts shall have been paid."*

As can be seen at once, none of these is comparable in the least to Sappho's explicit comparison of humans to gods.

Surely Page and Setti are not thinking of Homer. Homer, of course, did not write occasional verse; such similes, in Homer's world, are not *makarismoi*, but merely normal attributes. The point is that later poets, by using such a simile, would for a moment put their subject into Homer's world: *this was* the *makarismos*. And Sappho seems to have begun the practice, and hence to have made her own rules. And if we consult her usage, those rules become rather plain.

Of the eight similes of this type in her fragments, five occurred either in wedding songs or in songs that described weddings;¹⁷ a sixth (fr. 68a3) has no identifiable context, a seventh (fr. 96.4/5—the crux of the second objection above) is best explained as a conscious echo of hymeneal convention,¹⁸ and the last is the example in fr. 31 that is presently under consideration. Furthermore, the overwhelming bulk of all similes in Sappho rise from the occasion of marriage: out of eleven similes with extant contexts, *at least* seven belong to wedding songs. (This—i.e., marriage—is the “transforming” moment.) Page’s “demolition” seems rather ineffective here, and Snell seems to be vindicated in his opinion that the first line of fr. 31 would very likely be identified by an audience familiar with Sappho’s practice as the beginning of a wedding poem. We may compare Rufinus Domesticus for a very sapphic play on the traditional *εὐκάλεον*:

I call him blessed who looks on you, and thrice blessed who hears your voice, and he is a demigod who kisses your mouth: but a god, a god indeed, is the man whose bed receives you as bride.
(AP 5.94)

Surely Rufinus is deliberately echoing the first stanza of Sappho’s poem, and lending his support to the Wilamowitz-Snell position.

The second major point in the Wilamowitz-Snell position is the claim that *κῆνος ὥνηρ* should be understood to mean “the husband” rather than “that man”; and this also has met with two objections: 1) that Alcaeus in two places (H 2.3 and D 14.7) uses it to mean simply “man”,¹⁹ and 2) that Sappho herself says *γάμβρος* when she means bridegroom.²⁰

¹⁷Frr. 23.5, 44.21, 44.34, 105b, and 111.5. Kirkwood mentions fr. 23 among passages “where there is no evidence of a marriage hymn or where a marriage hymn is ruled out by the evidence” (*op. cit.* [above, n. 12] 259). But fr. 23 definitely does not belong in either of those categories. The last word, *παν]νυχίσι[δ]ην*, “to hold a vigil,” is used elsewhere by Sappho only for what the chorus of maidens does on the wedding night, and is strong evidence of hymeneal convention, as is the comparison of a young girl to Helen’s daughter Hermione, famed for her beauty, and the two-line *gnome* following it. These look like the elements of wedding song or of a song about a wedding—and for the purposes of this paper either will serve.

¹⁸See my “Sapphic Imagery and Fragment 96,” *Hermes* 101 (1973) 261–273.

¹⁹Page, *op. cit.* (above, n. 1) 31.

²⁰Setti, *op. cit.* (above, n. 7) 202.

I have argued elsewhere that Alcaeus is an unreliable guide to the meaning of Sappho's poetry—spiritually distant from it as he was. The myth of a highly consistent Lesbian vernacular which controlled the practice of both poets has been misleading; we may learn more by studying their individual aesthetic choices, as evinced in the differences between them, than by regarding their diction as something unalterably imposed from without. The case seems to be, in fact, that they are as different as any two poets of one time and place. It can be shown that Sappho observed certain self-imposed limitations of diction and imagery which Alcaeus did not observe.²¹ By studying her usage closely we can find answers, or at least clues, to several classic problems in sapphic scholarship. The present question is a case in point, since the various words for human being make up one of the most consistent patterns in her diction.

Sappho uses *γύνη* only of married women, *πάρθενος* of unmarried (but nubile?) women, and *παῖς* of young, unmarried girls; in ritual contexts she may use *κόρα* also. The evidence for men, though naturally much scantier, as they are mentioned rarely, suggests a similar set of distinctions. Twice she uses *ἥϊθεος*, "unmarried man," and nine times *ἄνηρ*. In fr. 44 (which has more people in it than any other and hence can tell us most about this), the *γύναικες* went out "together with the *πάρθενοι*" (lines 14/15) (i.e., they are different creatures), and then, in similar close conjunction, we read that the *ἄνδρες* yoked the horses to the chariots, and then something about the *ἥϊθεοι*. The latter is taken by Page to modify *ἄνδρες*;²² but is the sense, then, that the married women and the unmarried women and the unmarried men went out—but the married men (who, according to this reading, are not mentioned) stayed home? Rather, the close parallelism and proximity of the two pairs of terms—*γύνη/πάρθενος*, *ἄνηρ/ἥϊθεος*—suggests a parallel distinction, between wives and maidens on the one hand, husbands and bachelors on the other. We have, then, the sort of homey detail which we would expect from Sappho's public songs: "the men drew out the (heavy) yokes, and the boys (it was, after all, a special day) drove." The distinction is suggested again at the end of the poem. The *πάρθενοι*, we are told, sang a *μέλος ἄγνον*, and the *γύναικες* sang *ἐλελύσδω*; then *all* the men (*πάντες δ' ἄνδρες*) sang a lovely song to Apollo. Clearly Sappho points out the generic use of *ἄνηρ* because she feels that it needs to be pointed out. Again: Helen had the noblest husband (*ἄνδρα*) of all mankind (*ἀνθρώπων*) (fr. 16.7). So when *ἄνηρ* is used specifically, it seems to mean "married man". The number of occurrences of the different words will support this distinction: *γύνη* occurs but three times to seven for *πάρθενος*; *ἥϊθεος* but twice against nine

²¹*Op. cit.* (above, n. 18) 269–271.

²²*Op. cit.* (above, n. 1) 64.

for *ἀνὴρ*; it is as maidens, not as matrons, that Sappho is interested in women, but as husbands, not boys, that she is interested in men.

In sum, *ἀνὴρ* occurs a total of nine times, and there is no occurrence of it where it can be said that it clearly does not mean "husband", and several where it is beyond doubt that it does. The fact that Bowra and Page must go to Alcaeus to attempt to establish their point weakens it greatly: Alcaeus was not interested in these distinctions. Further, the point is treated as if it were an observation about the Lesbian-Aeolic dialect; it is rather an observation about the practice of one poet, and indeed of that one poet who was more interested in weddings and marriage than any other poet ever, and was one of the most careful and consistent in matters of diction. On this point, at least, she can be expected to get the words right.

There may be more weight to the objection that the terms *γάμβρος* and *νύμφα* ought to occur in a wedding song, but there is no evidence for the point, and we cannot allow it to influence us simply because it "sounds reasonable." The evidence concerning wedding songs is of course meagre; but what there is suggests that several songs (possibly as many as a dozen) were sung at various points in the celebration, and that these songs were governed by different conventions depending upon their place in the rite. Sappho does use *γάμβρος* repeatedly, especially in songs at the entrance to the bridal chamber; but in fr. 44, where the influence of Homer is strong, she avoids this word (which for Homer meant not "bridegroom" but "son-in-law"). It may be that she used the "official titles" for bride and groom at some stages of the ceremony and not at others (after all, the wedding guests know why they are there); and it may be that she used these words in actual *Hochzeitslieder* but not in poems *describing* weddings. On this point her usage cannot be determined from existing evidence. While the question of the meaning of *γάμβρος* must remain uncertain, this does not, I think, affect the fact that *κῆνος ὥνηρ* in line 1 would probably have meant either "married man" or "bridegroom" to Sappho's audience; in fact, it seems that *ἀνὴρ* by itself carried that connotation.

The third and last major point in the Wilamowitz-Snell position is the assertion that in Lesbos in Sappho's day men and women would not have been together socially in such intimacy unless they were either married or getting married. To this it is objected 1) that we do not know (Bowra) and, 2) that there is some suggestion of a greater possibility of relationships between the sexes at that time and place than in Attica in the classical age (Setti).

To the first objection it may be replied that we do know what Sappho and Alcaeus tell us, and that that is quite clear. In Alcaeus both men and women are mentioned, in groups and individually, but *never* together, except in the description of the *marriage* of Peleus and Thetis (fr. B 10).

Further, we have from Alcaeus many poems dealing with social occasions (mostly *symposia*) of the type which this poem might be taken to describe if it is not describing a wedding—and women appear in none of them. In Sappho the evidence is even clearer: men are never even mentioned except in poems about weddings. No doubt other evidence would be welcome, but that which we have could not be clearer: there is no positive justification, in our evidence about Lesbian society, for assuming that an event other than a wedding may be described in fr. 31. We may indeed base our argument on evidence about other societies—but then, which ones? The Lesbians, says Setti, were not Muslims.²³ True enough—but were they then Parisians? In fact, there is no evidence for social intimacy between the sexes, outside of marriage and courtesanship, for any archaic Greek culture. And the fact that Sappho was an accomplished poetess does not require that she (any more than Emily Dickinson) be an habituée of salons.

Similarly, Setti's "suggestion of a greater possibility of relationships between the sexes" is not documented, and there is nothing that could be called evidence for it (unless we wish to press into service the rumours, from Attic comedy, of her affairs with Anacreon, Hipponax, and Archilochus!). No doubt Setti is thinking of Sappho's high education and her participation in the 'masculine profession' of letters. But Sappho seems, judging from the extreme rarity with which she mentions men, either to have disliked their company or not to have had access to it. And in any case she was exceptional. Whether ancient Lesbian women in general became highly educated and wrote poetry we cannot tell; but even if they did, the evidence is that they kept (or were kept) away from men to whom they were not married.

To sum up, it seems that the three main points of Wilamowitz's and Snell's argument are sound—indeed sounder than they knew. And this can be established without going beyond the Aeolic fragments. It is erroneous to denounce the wedding theory (as Wills, for example, does²⁴) as an "*occasio ex machina*," brought in "from outside." In fact, all the evidence comes from within the sapphic and alcaic fragments—there are no external sources involved in the question (except the little poem of Rufinus Domesticus which I have introduced into the evidence). Rather, several types of internal evidence clearly converge in the suggestion that the scene of the poem is, as Wilamowitz intuited, a wedding, and that the poem begins, as Snell perceived, with two recognizable elements of hymeneal song.

Thus far we have appeared disposed to accept the Wilamowitz-Snell position. But we have only looked at the first stanza of the poem. It is in

²³*Op. cit.* (above, n. 7).

²⁴*Op. cit.* (above, n. 12) 168.

the following stanzas that the wedding-song theory encounters more serious problems.

The strongest argument, in my opinion, against the wedding-song theory was mentioned in passing by Setti (who objected that the "tone" of fr. 31 is different from the "tone" of the known hymeneal fragments) and was finally developed fully by Page. According to Snell, stanzas two to four serve as praise of the bride. But we would expect in this place a comparison of the bride to a specific goddess or other mythic female, and direct praise of her beauty, her virtue, her handiwork—not this indirect acting out. And it is not merely the indirection that should not be there but the torment. Wilamowitz described Sappho's wedding-songs as happy, joking songs—but surely this one is no joke. As Page flatly stated, the poem, if indeed sung at a wedding feast, was in incredibly, even absurdly, bad taste. I confess I cannot demur from this view. I hold it as practically (not quite utterly) out of the question that stanzas two to four were performed as a conventional *Hochzeitslied*. This virtual consensus does not, however, tell us what type of poem fr. 31 is, if indeed it is not an official and conventional *Hochzeitslied*. Here the consensus ends, and the various opponents of the Wilamowitz-Snell position go their different ways, depending primarily upon how they deal with the major difficulty facing all non-hymeneal interpretations: the presence of the man.²⁵

If Sappho is not writing about someone's wedding, if it is a poem about Passion, or about her specific passion for a certain girl, then why is the man mentioned at all? The traditional answer (flirted with by Page and more recently presented strongly by Robert Bagg)²⁶ is that the subject of the poem is not Sappho's love of the girl, but her jealousy of the man. A variant of this (first proposed by Welcker, and liked by Setti, and, more recently, by Wills and Kirkwood) explains that it is not the man's favoured position beside the girl which Sappho envies, but the man's composure under the onslaught of the girl's charms, which would reduce Sappho herself to idiocy. But either of these views requires that the antecedent of τὸ in line 5 be *ἰσθάνει καὶ . . . ὑπακούει* (that is, the *man*); ordinary grammar, on the other hand (relative takes nearest antecedent) would favour *ἄδου φωνέισας . . . καὶ γελαίσας ἰμέροεν* (that is, the *girl*); and how is the reader to divine that ordinary grammar is not in effect here?²⁷

²⁵The seemingly endless argument about whether *ὅστις* in line 2 has a definite or an indefinite antecedent strikes me as fruitless and, in fact, of little importance. Perhaps Rydbeck has silenced it at last. (See "Sappho's *φαίνεται μοι κῆνος*," *Hermes* 97 [1969] 161–166.)

²⁶Robert Bagg, "Love, Ceremony and Daydream in Sappho's Lyrics," *Arion* 3.4 (1964) 65. Against this view see Kirkwood, *op. cit.* (above, n. 12) 255.

²⁷Cf. Kirkwood, "The reference of τὸ is to what immediately precedes," which seems slightly at variance with his apparent position (mentioned just above) that Sappho is

Further, Sappho says, "When I look at *you* I cannot speak, etc.," and the σ of the mss cannot lightly be disposed of (as, for example, Beattie tries to do).²⁸ Page suggests, "When I look at you *being looked at by him*,"²⁹ but there seems little warrant for this in Sappho's regular practice. For Sappho, *seeing a beautiful thing* leads to love; it is always the beauty of the thing (not, say, its possession by someone else) that is the cause, and *love* (not jealousy) that is the result. "Ιδην ["to see"] is, in fact, a key emotional word for her, as is *μνᾶσθαι* ["to remember"]³⁰. It seems that most frequently the jealousy theory is adopted not because the text recommends it, but as a result of one's rejecting the wedding theory and being left with an extra, and very prominently placed, man to account for.

Koniaris asks us to see the poem as an encomium in which two witnesses, first some external man and then the poet herself, testify to the girl's beauty.³¹ But what testimony does the man give? He speaks no praise, and he shows none of the effects which Sappho feels. And why is he compared to a god? That the poem is in a sense encomiastic is plausible enough, but it (like fr. 16) is an encomium disguised within some other genre; and it is the nature of that other genre which we must find out.

Bowra's view, which seems to hold the lead in Page's mind also—that the man is present because the poem describes some actual event at which he was present—strikes me as the least satisfactory. "Its powerful impact," says Bowra, "comes from its air of reality, of being derived immediately and directly from Sappho's own experience."³² Page goes on similarly: "Rarely, if anywhere, in archaic or classical poetry shall we find language so close to the speech of everyday."³³ But if the man is in the poem only because he was at the event, then we must chide our poet. If there had been other persons present would she have had to mention them, too? Was she so primitive that she did not know how to omit what was artistically irrelevant? Are her poems no more than touchingly faithful recordings of actual everyday events? Her psychology no more

contrasting herself with the man, not simply and directly expressing herself vis-à-vis the girl. See *op. cit.* (above, n. 12) 122, 255. Those who want the man to be a "contrast figure for Sappho" (as Kirkwood puts it) might better follow Gallavotti's view that the entire first stanza is the antecedent (*op. cit.* [above, n. 8] 117).

²⁸A. J. Beattie, "Sappho fr. 31," *Mnemosyne* 4.9 (1956) 103–111. I regard his suggestion that it is the *man* for whom Sappho is overcome by passion as an oddity. Cf. "A Note on Sappho, fr. 1," *CQ* N.S. 7 (1957) 180–183, where he again suggests that it is a man for whom Sappho is pining.

²⁹*Op. cit.* (above, n. 1) 22.

³⁰Cf. esp. *frr.* 22.13/14 and 55.3, where "unseen" may well suggest "unloved." Turyn, *Stud. Sapph.* 33–41, has amassed parallels from Homer to Apuleius.

³¹*Op. cit.* (above, n. 12).

³²*Op. cit.* (above, n. 11) 187.

³³*Op. cit.* (above, n. 1) 30.

than recently felt emotions honestly rendered? I will repeat my belief that Bowra's view—simplicity = truthfulness—may be directly wrong: Pindar impresses me as more forthright than Sappho, because he seems not to guard his words as she does. In any case, if the man can be accounted for by some positive construction (such as the wedding theory) then we need not fall back on the simplism that "he is there because he was there."

To sum up both sides of the matter: the view that the scene of fr. 31 is a wedding and that at least the first stanza observes conventions of the wedding-song seems substantiated by the three Wilamowitz-Snell arguments and by the fact that the man is present in the poem at all (which has not comfortably been accounted for otherwise); further, the apparent likelihood that the poem contained a fifth stanza is nicely accounted for, as Snell noted, by the need for a final statement of good wishes for the bride and groom.³⁴ Yet Setti's and Page's view that it is in impossibly bad taste, at a public event, for the poetess to praise the bride by morbidly dwelling on her own unhappy passion for her, seems incontestable. It seems that both sides are right, and also that both sides are wrong. The poem does have something to do with a wedding; at the beginning it seems to pretend to be a wedding song; but it is not an actual *Hochzeitslied* sung at an historical wedding. Are we in a *cul de sac*?

It must be remembered that we are dealing with a subtle poet who *characteristically* mixes the conventions of different genres (especially choral and monodic) and who achieves, through this mixing, multi-levelled effects involving ironic interplay between the themes of objective and subjective, public and private, external and internal, historical and poetical.³⁵ Instead of trying to explain away either the one aspect of the poem or the other, let us accept both as intentionally given by the poet; in that way we can deal with the poem in its totality, instead of seeing only half of it at a time.

³⁴See note 1 above. I have omitted detailed discussion of this problem, as I have nothing new to offer on it and the evidence as it presently stands is inconclusive. The main question is how far we want to push Milne's "ring form" (see "The Final Stanza of *φαίveral μου*," *Hermes* 71 [1936] 126–128): does the *φαίνεται/φαίνομαι* echo fulfil it, or is a more substantial thematic echo needed (as Milne himself thought), in which case either the Wilamowitz-Snell "good wishes to the bride and groom" must occur or something like West's reconstruction of a gnomic ending (*op. cit.* [above, n. 1] 12), or a combination of these elements.

³⁵See my articles "Sappho, Fragment Ninety-Four," *Phoenix* 25 (1971) 1–11; "Sappho, Fragment Two," *Phoenix* 26.4 (1972) 323–333; and "Sapphic Imagery and Fragment 96," cited above (n. 18), where some of the evidence is given. Other sapphic fragments respond well to this approach, too, most familiarly fr. 16, which, as Fraenkel has shown, mixes choral and monodic elements. (See *Dichtung und Philosophie* [1961] 212. Fraenkel is wrong, however, in his belief that fr. 16 is the *only* multi-layered [*mehrschichtige*] poem which we have from Sappho.)

A comparison with an undoubtedly hymeneal fragment is a good place to begin:

δλβιε γάμβρε, σοὶ μὲν δὴ γάμος ὥς ἄραο
 ἐκτετέλεστ', ἔχῃς δὲ πάρθενον †ἀν† ἄραο . . .
 σοὶ χάριεν μὲν εἶδος, ὅππατα δ' <αὐτε νύμφας>
 μέλλιχ', ἔρος δ' ἐπ' ἰμέρτῳ κέχυται προσώπῳ
 τετίμακ' ἔξοχά σ' Ἀφροδίτα

Fr. 112³⁶

Happy bridegroom! the wedding which you prayed for is fulfilled, and you have the girl you prayed for; your face is fair, but her eyes are gentle indeed, and love is shed over all her beautiful face . . . Aphrodite has favored you exceedingly.

It follows the general outline of fr. 31: a statement of the happiness of the man, followed by the reasons for it, which consist primarily of a description of the beauty of the bride in terms (ἔρος . . . ἰμέρτῳ) which suggest that the singer desires her too. But how different it is! The tone is naive and direct; the mood is happiness shared by all; there is no hint that the singer and the bridegroom are not in harmony in their attitudes toward the event. So simple, even flat, is the language, and so childish the psychology that it is easy to believe that this is a commissioned poem, written to please an audience of ordinary tastes.³⁷ Fragment 31 seems to be a violent, even cruel, parody of this, laying bare the face behind the mask, as it were, the harder, stronger, uglier psychology of the adult that lies behind the feigned happiness of popular culture and its public events. Let us review the situation once more.

The poem is not a *Hochzeitslied* and is not being performed at a wedding. It is being presented by Sappho to her usual audience, whoever they may have been (perhaps there would be no harm in saying, *exempli*

³⁶I have used Bowra's reconstruction of line 3, which is called for not only by the general context but also (and especially) by the μὲν-δέ construction, which Page's version ignores (*op. cit.* [above, n. 1] 122, and see his note 3, where he acknowledges the version here given).

³⁷It is within the realm of possibility that Sappho may actually have *made her living* writing commissioned poems for public events, perhaps specializing in weddings. The widespread belief that she was from an aristocratic family and led a life of cultured leisure has no more foundation than the belief that she was a school-mistress. It rests *entirely* upon a single rather oblique remark of Athenaeus, writing almost a thousand years after Sappho: "The highest-born youths used to pour wine among the ancients . . . And the beautiful Sappho many times praised her brother Larichus as wine-pourer in the city-hall of the Mytilenaeans" (Ath. 10.424e). Of course, Pindar says that once poets did not toil for gold and now they do (*I.* 2.6-8). But he does not say which poets. Orpheus and Musaeus, perhaps? Herodotus (1.24) says that the Lesbian poet Arion of Methymna, in the generation *before* Sappho, went to Italy and Sicily and made a fortune. The whole question needs to be reconsidered (as does the question of *publication* in the sixth century). I should point out, however, that it is introduced here only in passing and that the intent of this article as a whole does not in the least depend on how one answers it.

gratia only, to her *Mädchenbunde*). When they hear the first stanza they recognize the scene as a wedding and the allusions to wedding-song, and they assume they are hearing a *Hochzeitslied*. In the following stanzas, however, a change occurs: what began as a public song of polite celebration ends as an inner song of pain and despair. What is being revealed to us in this remarkable shift is the relationship between Sappho's external reality and her internal imagination. It is as if she has begun a polite and conventional public song but, while she sings it, her conflicting inner feelings well up and flow over the boundaries of courtesy to reveal the bitter truth of inner longing and frustration, in grotesque contrast with the expectation which the first stanza of the poem aroused. Or: it is as if in stanza one we hear what her tongue is singing outwardly while the following stanzas tell us what her heart is singing, at the same time, inside. In other words, we have here much more than an occasional poem. The poem does indeed suggest a dramatic situation—but whether this dramatic setting was based on a specific historical occasion or not is irrelevant; it may just as well have been distilled from many such occasions, or cut from the wholecloth of the imagination. In any case, the dramatic (*not* the historical) situation can be reconstructed: there is a wedding; Sappho has been asked to write or sing the wedding song, and she has begun nicely; then the sight of the beauty of the bride sends her out of control, calling up her very ambivalent feelings about homosexuality and married happiness.³⁸ Then, in stanza two, her public, impersonal role is eclipsed by her internal, personal reaction. Her tongue falls silent, meaning, perhaps, that the impersonal public song ends: it has given way now to the inner song which is in such passionate conflict with the public occasion. Overcome by passion, she refuses to mouthe the polite lies anymore, and allows her true passion, which, we may presume, had been repressed on many earlier occasions when she sang the hymeneals, to flow on to its exaggerated end when she seems about to faint or swoon, and says that she thinks she is almost dying. Finally she calls herself back from this unconsciousness/death and directs herself to the objective realm again, making peace with it through a *gnome* whose beginning ("But anything can be endured . . .") cannot but remind one of the famous Catullan ending: "*At tu, Catulle, destinatus obdura*" and it seems likely enough that Catullus learned from Sappho this sudden change indicating the irrational imperium of passion). Quite possibly, as Wilamowitz and Snell conjectured, she returned in the last two or three lines to the public song, the conventional congratulations to the bride and groom standing in ironic, even horrible contrast to the painful inner song which has intruded before them.³⁹

³⁸See the author's articles on frs. 94 and 96, cited above (notes 18 and 35).

³⁹Cf. Perotta, *Saffo e Pindaro* (Bari 1935) 48, "*La poesia dell'ode è nel contrasto tra la prima strofe e le altre: tra la gioia dei due innamorati felici e l'ardore disperato di Saffo.*"

Bowra (in the first edition of *Greek Lyric Poetry*, but not in the second, which was published after Page's attack), and Snell in his modified position after Page's attack, and Kirkwood in his discussion of Merkelbach, have all suggested the possibility that, although the scene is a wedding, the poem is not being performed at a wedding but at a later meeting of the "*Mädchenkreis*".⁴⁰ While this is substantially what I am suggesting, all these authors miss the significance of the view because they do not explore Sappho's purpose in the allusions to hymeneal song in stanza one. She is in fact giving us a glimpse behind the mask of the Sappho who sang the conventional *Hochzeitslieder* at real, historical weddings. She is showing us the extreme disharmony which she must have felt inwardly on such occasions. She seems to be the first poet who has left us a record of what has since become a familiar situation: the poet as a sensitive soul suffering feelings of frustration and alienation from the problems of relating his or her work to conventional social realities. Needless to say, in this case the situation was aggravated by Sappho's homosexuality. That she, who could not participate in the happiness of marrying one of these young girls, had to sing praises of those who did marry them, must have seemed at times a bitter paradox indeed. And in fr. 31, for perhaps the only time, she has let that bitter paradox rise to the surface and be clearly expressed.⁴¹

We have, it is true, been led to this view by a desire to avoid the two great internal problems: the awkwardness of stanzas three and four if the poem is a wedding-song, and the awkwardness of stanzas one and two if it is not. There is more to recommend it than its convenience, however; let us consider certain points of diction and imagery.

Nowhere else in our fragments is Sappho's imagery comparably physical. Not only does she mention the body far more than usual, but she uses words that are at variance with her usual consistent practice—and the deviation is always in the direction of cruder, more physical

⁴⁰Bowra, *loc. cit.* (above, n. 6); Snell, *loc. cit.* (above, n. 10); and Kirkwood, *op. cit.* (above, n. 12) 258.

⁴¹Regardless of whether she was a professional poetess or an aristocratic amateur, Sappho seems to have specialized in wedding-songs and thus many times to have had the experience of outwardly praising heterosexual union while keeping her inward feelings veiled. This can be concluded both from the ancient testimonia, which are largely concerned with Sappho's epithalamia, and from the meagre evidence of our extant corpus, as follows. Fr. 23 is from *POxy.* 1231, which gives us the end of book one; it seems to be hymeneal in character, as does the next identifiable fragment in the papyrus (fr. 27) and the next again (fr. 30). On the principle, first proposed by Edmonds (*Lyra Graeca* 1, 218/219) and adopted by Page (*op. cit.* [above, n. 1] 125/126), that the hymeneal songs were gathered at the ends of books of like metres, it seems that rather more than 200 lines of book one were hymeneal and of book two at least 80–100 lines at the end. That the two books for the structure of which we have some evidence show high quantities of epithalamia suggests (as do our testimonia) that Sappho wrote many such songs. I hope to treat these and other questions about the sapphic epithalamia in a later article.

terms. Let us disabuse ourselves of the notion that it is even possible, much less creditable, for a great poet simply to lapse into everyday speech without being keenly aware of the poetic significance of each word.

καρδία, "heart", does not occur elsewhere in our fragments; her usual word for the organ in which erotic responses are located is *θῦμος*, "soul"; she has in this case alone in our fragments chosen the physically descriptive term over the non-imagistic one.

γλῶσσα, "tongue", in line 9 occurs twice in other contexts in the sapphic fragments: "If your tongue had not been cooking up something evil to say" (fr. 137.4), and, "When anger spreads in the breast, the yapping tongue must be restrained" (fr. 158.1). The first (according to Aristotle a reply to an indecent proposal by Alcaeus) refers not to ordinary speech but to poetry, and it seems likely that the second also was in castigation of some ill-tempered poet (Archilochus?). Yet Sappho does not ordinarily refer to the organs of speech when talking about poetry, but to the voice: someone is called *λιγύφωνος*, "clear-voiced" (fr. 30.8); someone else (Mika?) *μελλιχόφων*["], "soft-voiced" (fr. 71.6); maidens are *μελιφώνοι*, "honey-voiced" (fr. 185); a girl is *ἀδύφωνον*, "sweet-voiced" (fr. 153). The difference between these passages and those with *γλῶσσα* is that in the latter the poetic act is not praised but reproached; poetry has been misused: poets have behaved not like devotees of the Muses but like ordinary people. Hence no musical image is used; the words are presented as the products of the tongue alone. Here we find that same distinction between the realm of poetry and that of experience which underlies fr. 31. By such word-choices Sappho locates the scene of this poem in the realm where poetry fails, where it is unable to create a healing reality stronger than external circumstance.

πῦρ, "fire", does not occur elsewhere in our fragments; *ψύχος*, "cold", is used once of water (fr. 2.5) and once of the spirit (*θῦμος*) in birds. Only in fr. 31 are the unpleasant physical sensations of heat and cold a part of Sappho's poetic world. They are, again, intrusions from the uncontrollable realm of physical circumstance from which Sappho's poetry usually provides escape.

ἀκοῖαι, "ears", are nowhere else mentioned, much less an unmusical and unpleasant and uncontrollable humming or roaring in them. In Sappho's poetic world one hears usually only the sweetness of flutes or bubbling of brooks, sounds which represent the beauty and harmony of the realm of imagination, to which the poetess, in fr. 31, is unpleasantly deafened by force of circumstance.

*ἵδρω*s, "sweat": the phrase is from Homer (e.g., *Od.* 11.599); it is not to be expected in Sappho's ordinary imagery, where a heart may be weighed down by grief, or flutter with desire, but where the fact that bodies sweat elsewhere finds no cause to be mentioned.

τρόμος, "a tremor": the adjectival form, τρομέροις, "trembling", appears in a poem (fr. 21.4) which evidently described in unpleasant terms the bodily decrepitude of old age. Like other physically unattractive qualities of the body, it is not mentioned in the mainstream of Sappho's poetry.

In Sappho's general practice, parts of the body are mentioned only as containers of erotic beauty. (This is true also of the old age fragment just referred to, where the point is that they no longer have it.) They usually occur in decorative compounds (καλλίκομοι, "fair haired," βροδόπαχυνς, "pink-armed," εὔποδα, "lovely footed") or modified by her typical adjectives for feminine beauty (ἄπαλαι δέραι, "delicate throat," ἱμέρτωι προσώπωι, "lovely face," ὀπποτα μέλλιχ', "gentle eyes", ἐράτοις φόβαισιν, "beautiful tresses", etc.), and in conjunction with her most typical imagery as seen in the other poems: hands are to weave garlands with, hair is to twine them in, etc. Fr. 31 departs conspicuously from all of these generalities. How are we to understand it in relation to the many fragments like 2, 16, 94 and 96, which most would see as representative of the mainstream of Sappho's poetic imagery and diction? Why has she deviated so stunningly here? There is a strikingly clear and simple answer, which fits well with our view of fr. 31 as a two-levelled poem dealing with the tension between inner and outer truth.

We have supposed, from the other poems, that in Sappho's poetic world she presents young girls in an idealized poetic environment where they live among symbols of their erotic beauty and symbols drawn from ritual, especially the wedding rite; their life is a constant rite of preparation for loss of maidenhood.⁴² But in fr. 31 she presents us not with this dream of beauty which she, as poet, controls, but with *the real thing—an actual wedding*. By excluding from it all the symbols of beauty (flowers, songs, etc.) and describing for the first and only time the actual body, its unpleasant lack of control, its inability to fulfil the mind's idealized desires, its ugly pain and crude helplessness, she makes explicit the difference between the real and the poetic worlds. Consider the pathos and irony, the great wit, of what is accomplished here. The pathos is that she must confess that she hates in the real world what she loves in the imagined one; the irony that while she portrays the disintegration of certain conventions of song (the conventional public song proves unable to contain true passion) she forces the two realities finally to cooperate in another, incredibly tense and explosive, song.

And only here, of all the poems, is Sappho herself at the centre stage. Elsewhere she consoles another girl, who is at the centre of the poem, or invisibly watches over the grove of the goddess, who stands at the centre, or follows a departed companion (who is at the centre) down the lanes of

⁴²See my articles cited above (nn. 18 and 35).

memory or imagination—but here she is present *in the flesh*, and at the absolute centre of the poem, in a reality which is an affliction to her alone. Now for once the grim facts of bodily death become overwhelmingly clear and close: she is mortal; her tongue of songs is broken; sweat pours down her body. Here the basic lyric-erotic mysticism (or nightmare) is first fully presented—the identification, inherited from Archilochus (who is Sappho's true predecessor), of *eros* and *thanatos*, love and death. At that tormented boundary between the imagined and the perceived, the desired and the enforced, the private and the public songs, the initiate of Aphrodite's mysteries lies, as Archilochus said, "dead with love, pierced through the bones with the horrible pains the gods have sent me."

"But wait, Catullus! Stiffen your spine! Be strong!"

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