

BROKEN HEARTS AND THE SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES IN SAPPHO'S POETRY

I

I have argued elsewhere that it is possible to see the situation in Fr.31 LP in a new light, and I have suggested that the speaker may be identified with a woman who loses to another woman in her bid for the man¹). The lyric 'I' in general, and the monodic 'I' in particular, does not always express the poet's own private affairs, and the speaker's emotional state, which aroused suspicion and was translated into the anxiety attack of a homosexual or into a love declaration for the girl, can be the *affective reaction* of a heterosexual woman which is not uncommon in Greek folk poetry.

In the present paper I propose to discuss the social background of the fragment in question in an attempt to identify possible causes for the emotional breakdown which Sappho presents – given the fact that Greek poetry is rooted in social life – though lyric does not, and need not, always deal with the situations and problems of real people. Understanding of the background may help us understand the poetic situation much better. Once more helpful material is forthcoming from Greek folk poetry²), and some poems will be considered in the present context.

Modern studies have sufficiently demonstrated that *affective reactions* (such a reaction is presented by Sappho) are often related to social factors which include family structure and cultural values, behaviour-regulating beliefs³), and, more importantly, the

1) Cf. my paper Some Neglected Aspects of Love in Sappho's Fr. 31 LP., Rhein. Mus. 122 (1979), 97 ff. and my study Self Expression in Early Greek Lyric, Elegiac and Iambic Poetry, Wiesbaden 1977 (Palingenesia XI), 70 ff.

2) The new material was carefully collected at the Research Center of Greek Folklore in Athens, and I especially thank S. Imellos, Director of the Center, for giving me access to a large collection of unpublished material.

3) See esp. H. Fabrega, Jr., Cultural Influences in Depression, 67 ff., with bibliography, in Depression and Human Existence (ed. E. James Anthony – Tere-se Benedek), Boston 1975. Fabrega is primarily concerned with the problem of depression but his investigation has a general application as far as the influence of

status of women⁴). The general influence and importance of these factors depend upon the society's cultural type and level, and in reading Greek lyric, we should, therefore, not make the mistake to judge *affective reactions* by the standards of our own culture.

It is difficult to analyse social factors in terms of a specific application to any given case of *affective reactions* and since this paper is not a social or, for that matter, a psychiatric study, the best approach that can be made to the problem is to try to interpret the poetic material against its own social background inasmuch as this is possible. Not only poets are exposed to social influences and are susceptible to the problems of their fellow man, but also folk singers⁵). In this regard Greek folk poetry is very instructive, for it gives us helpful insights into the hearts and minds of ordinary people who live and work in an environment that refuses to change quickly and radically⁶) and who consequently face anew age-old problems in human relationships.

In love folk songs there is grief, anxiety, despair, and physical symptoms of the affected person are described⁷). *Affective reactions* abound, and we shall now see that what causes them is often, but not always, tied to social circumstances, and we hope that the new discussion will illuminate another aspect of the situation in Sappho's poem.

In numerous Greek folk songs there is a recurrent theme: the complaint of the love-sick girl. Listen to her in Sappho⁸):

γλύκηα μάτερ, οὔτοι
 δύναμαι κρέκην τὸν ἴστον
 πόθῳ δάμεισα παῖδος
 βραδίναν δι' Ἀφροδίταν.

society upon a healthy individual is concerned. See also his paper Problems Implicit in the Cultural and Social Study of Depression, *Psychosomatic Medicine* 36 (1974), 377 ff. Cf. further C. Smith-Rosenberg, *The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict in 19th-Century America*, *Social Research* 39 (1972), 652 ff.

4) See esp. B. Simon, *Mind and Madness in Ancient Greece*, Ithaca and London 1978, *passim*, esp. ch. 13 entitled *Hysteria and Social Issues*, pp. 238 ff.

5) In this context see Linda Dégh, *Folktales and Society: Story-Telling in a Hungarian Peasant Community*, Bloomington 1969 *passim*.

6) Yet cf. also in this context D. Demetrakopoulou-Lee, *Greece, in Cultural Patterns and Technical Change* (ed. M. Mead), Paris (UNESCO) 1953, and my paper *Rhein. Mus.* 122 (1979), 107.

7) See my paper *op.cit.* pp. 107-112.

8) Fr. 102 LP. Cf. my study, *op.cit.* 79 and the bibliography there.

Her mother assigned her the work at the loom⁹), but she is now in love and cannot do her work anymore. What she wants, we may learn from other Greek folk songs, in which the girl says that she wants to marry the man she loves, and her mother can, and as a rule does, play a key role. But if the mother's (and by extension the family's) response to the girl's feelings is negative, her reaction is often one of despair as we shall see. There is an Alcaeus fragment that seems to me appropriate to quote in the present context¹⁰):

ἔμε δείλαν, ἔ]με παίσ[αν κακοτάτων πεδέχοισαν
]δομονο[
]ει μόρος αἰσχ[
 4 ἐπὶ γὰρ πᾶρ]ος ὀνίατον [ικ(άνει),
 ἐλάφω δὲ]βρόμος ἐν σ[τήθεσι φνίει φοβέροισιν
 μ]αινόμενον[
]ἀνάταισ' ὦ[

What is the 'shameful lot' of the 'wretched woman'¹¹)? Here too other Greek folk songs, from the more recent past, may help us find an answer. It seems to me that the poem reflects an aspect of the reality which some women faced when they could not get married.

The love-smitten girl turns to her mother mainly because the fulfilment of her love, in terms of a marriage, largely depends upon her mother's support and upon her family's decision, and often it is the mother who first perceives that her daughter is downhearted and inquires about her condition¹²):

9) In ancient Greek society it was the mother's responsibility to assign work and household duties to members of her family and to those belonging to it. Cf. for example Il. Z 491 f. (Hector's instructions to his wife). In this context cf. also E. Burck, *Die Frau in der griechisch-römischen Antike*, München 1969, p. 21 f.

10) Fr. 10 B LP. Cf. also my study, *op.cit.* 87.

11) W. Rösler, *Dichter und Gruppe: Eine Untersuchung zu den Bedingungen und zur historischen Funktion früher griechischer Lyrik am Beispiel Alkaios*, München 1980 (*Theorie und Geschichte der Literatur und der Schönen Künste*, Bd. 50), p. 39, n. 39, speaks of a "grotesk-pathetische Liebesklage eines Mädchens oder einer Frau" which we can only imagine as a "derb-witzige Unterhaltung ... in einer Männergesellschaft wie der Hetairie".

12) In one case at least it is the father who does so. Cf. *Folklore Center No. 1430 σ. 10* (K. Bentas) from *Siatista* (Ἐπύλλ. 2,8), referred to as (27) in the present study.

Τί ἔχεις, Διενίτσα μου, μὲ θλιβερὴ καρδιά,
 Τί νὰ σοῦ πῶ, μαννούλα μου, ἀγάπη εἶν' πολλή,
 καὶ παρτιώρισά την κ' ἔγεινα λωλή¹³).

There are several songs with the same motif¹⁴). The girl suffers from love grief¹⁵), and the real problem is that her family has to give approval to her love in order for it to have a future in terms of a marriage. So now her mother wants to know who the man is¹⁶), so that they can both ask the master of the house for his approval (vv. 8–9 of the same poem)¹⁷):

γὰ πέ μου, Διενίτσα, ποιὸν εἶναι ἴπ' ἀγαπᾶς
 νὰ ποῦμε στὸν ἀφέντη, πέλκι καὶ τὸν ἐπᾶς;

It is not the father who decides whether or not his daughter will marry the man, it is the mother:

Πές μου τον, Πολυξένη, ποιὸν ἀγαπᾶς
 καὶ ἴω θὰ σὲ τὸν δώσω ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδιάς¹⁸).

The social factor that causes anxiety to the girl is the family structure which gives the father or the mother the power to inter-

13) G. Papadopoulos, Γλωσσικὴ ὕλη τῆς νήσου Νισύρου, Ζωγράφου. Ἐργαζομένη Ἄρ. 400 ἄρ. 22 (Ἐπύλλ. 2,8) in the Folklore Center referred to as (31). Translation: 'What's the matter with you, my Dienitsa, that your heart is so sorrowful?' – 'What should I say to you, my mother, love is overwhelming and I suppressed it and went out of my mind.'

14) Cf. Folklore Center No. 2342 σ. 138–140 (S. Imellos) from Naxos (Ἐπύλλ. 2,8) vv. 1–5. (29); No. 1137 σ. 17–18 ἄρ. 37 (O. Gousiou) from Serres (Ἐπύλλ. 2,8), (32); No. 1684 A σ. 181, ἄρ. 138 (S. E. Ioannidis) from Amorgos (Ἐπύλλ. 2,8), (33); M. K. Krispis, Ὑλη, ἄρ. 2040 (Ἐπύλλ. 2,8), (34); A. Manousidis, Ἄρχ. Θρακ. Θησ. Γ σ. 57–58 (Ἐπύλλ. 2,8), (30); No. 2758, σ. 184–185 (G. K. Spyridakis) from Kimolos (Ἐπύλλ. 2,8), (23).

15) It is indicated elsewhere that 'love grief' can be a more serious problem. In a song (23) the suffering girl confesses to her mother that she is pregnant (v. 4) and since her mother does not give approval to her marriage, the girl dies.

16) There are short songs which do not go any further; they only present us with the girl's (love) grief and her mother's asking about its nature. Cf. Folklore Center No. 2951 p. 162 (D. Ch. Settas), Platon, 28 (1880) p. 25 (Stamatelos).

17) Note that this particular point is slightly varied in some poems. In (29) (n. 14 above) the girl does not wait for her mother to ask the question; she tells her first. In (30), (33) and (34) the mother asks the question but not in order to inform her husband about it.

18) Cf. (32) above, vv. 5–6. Translation: 'Tell me, Polyxena, who is the man you love and I will give him to you from all my heart.' Cf. also the 'Adonitsa' song quoted by A. Diamantaras, Γλωσ. ὕλη ἐκ Μεγίστης (Καστελ.). Ἐλλ. Φιλ. Συλλ. Κων/πόλεως, ΚΑ' 1891, σ. 353–54, ἄρ. 9 vv. 3–4 (Ἐπύλλ. 2,8), (36) and the same, Ὑλη ἄρ. 2221 (Ἐπύλλ. 2,8), (37).

fare in his or her daughter's private life regardless of her feelings. This factor can be further analysed, as we shall see, in terms of an interplay of other social factors that tend to have a negative influence on the girl.

In the 'Dienitsa' song the girl is in love with the son of her mother's cousin (v. 12) who gave her many presents (vv. 16–17). She realizes that her family will not give approval to her love and asks her mother to give those beautiful presents away because she cannot take them to her grave (v. 25 ff.). But before we consider the girl's reaction to what cannot be done, or changed, let us first note that the reason for the family's disapproval is sometimes implicit in the poem but never explicitly stated. In this particular case the mother does not say anything, presumably because the girl well understands the reason: the man is a relative¹⁹). In the 'Polyxena' song (32) the mother says to her daughter that she would see her dead rather than make the man she loves her son-in-law (vv. 9–10)²⁰):

Κάλλιο, Πολυξένη, νεκρή νὰ σὲ ἰδῶ
παρὰ γαμπρὸ νὰ κάμω τοῦ Ἀσημάκη τὸ γυιό.

No reason is given for the rejection of the man. But a man's ethnic-religious background may be reason enough for a mother to reject him as the 'Theanitsa' song indicates (vv. 15–16):

Καλλιὰ ἄω, Θεανίτσα, σοῦ Τούρκου τὸ σπαθί,
παρὰ Ρωμιὸ νὰ πάρης νὰ γίνης Χριστιανή²¹).

This pronouncement breaks the girl's heart as it does in another song, where the rejected lover is a neighbour, and the girl indicates in a reply to her mother's question about him that he is

19) In the 'Panagiota' song (27) v. 5 the lover is the father's nephew and he kills her; in another song that might be called 'Aglaia', Folklore Center No. 2951, p. 43 (D. Chr. Settas) from Euboiá (25), the lover is the mother's nephew, v. 5 (the girl commits suicide). In classical Greece, it may be noted, marriages within the *anchisteia*, and the family at large, were extremely common (cf. esp. W. K. Lacey, *The Family in Classical Greece*, London 1968, p. 106), so that parents would not reject a suitor on this ground.

20) See also the 'Theonitsa' song (33), vv. 10–11 and "Υλη ἀρ. 2151 ('Επύλλ. 2,8), (35), which is another, shorter, version of the same song, and E. Matoukarakis, Πρωμ. Πυροφόρος (1933) ἀρ. 200, σ. 7, 11–12 ('Επύλλ. 2,8), (38), which is also another version of the song.

21) Cf. (34); this differs from (33). In translation: 'I would prefer, Theanitsa, to deliver you to the Turk's sword rather than to have you marry a Romios to become a Christian.'

'short' or 'underage'²²). The problem is that the mother measures the value and qualifications of her daughter's lover by personal or family standards. In the 'Adonitsa' song the rejected lover is the son of an inn-keeper²³), and he would seem to have, in the Greek mother's eyes, a low social status²⁴).

In a society in which a woman's self-esteem depends upon her husband's social position, the man's job and family background can be crucial. That is why a father rejects a suitor, saying that there are more suitable men, like teachers and captains, who ask him for his daughter's hand²⁵). The parents decide what is best for their daughter and a mother may even seek out a man who is not for her daughter²⁶).

The Greek parents' interference extends to the male members of the family as well. In a lengthy song a man says to the woman he has deserted that the real cause of her troubles and his is his mother²⁷). Sometimes the mother does not know that her son loves secretly, and so she arranges for him a marriage with a girl of her own choice²⁸). A boy knows that he cannot, as a rule, marry a girl without his parents' permission, and that is why he asks his girl that they go and see his parents, but she is afraid lest her brothers find out²⁹), which really means that her family may

22) Cf. the 'Adonitsa' song (36), v. 8: τὸ μικρο-Κωσταντάτου τὸ γειτονό-πουλο ('the short Kostantatis, the neighbour'). The adjective μικρὸς can mean either 'short' or 'underage'.

23) Cf. (37) v. 11.

24) In a lovely song called 'The Apple' quoted by A. Kriaris, Συλλ. κρητ. ἀσμάτων, 1920-1921, σ. 367-8 ('Επύλλ. Β, 23), (15) the mother rebukes her daughter for being in love with a shepherd and for wishing to marry him (v. 11): Μωρή, βοσκὸν ἀγάπησες; μωρή, βοσκὸ θὰ πάρης; 'Look at his boots', she says, 'smeared with all kinds of dirt' (vv. 12-14). This is indicative of the man's low status. Cf. also Προμηθεὺς Πυρφόρος (1931), Ζ' ἀρ. 163 σ. Ζ' ('Επύλλ. Β, 23), (17) for another version of the same theme.

25) Cf. A. Kriaris, *op.cit.* 281 ('Επύλλ. Β, 60), (1).

26) Cf. A. Aravatinos, Συλλογὴ δημοδῶν ἀσμάτων, Athens 1880, p. 196 No. 320 (6), where the mother is told that the man she wants for her daughter demands too much dowry. We shall see that dowry is a crucial factor and creates tensions within the family.

27) Cf. Folklore Center No. 2441, σ. 9-10 (E. Oustamanolakis-Dandoulakis) 1959-62, (19), vv. 9-10:

Ἦ μάνα μου ἴνα ἀφορμὴ καὶ τυρανῶ κι ἐσένα,

παντρεύομαι βρὲ λυγρὴ δὲν εἶναι κι ἀπὸ μένα.

It is not his own choice that he marries another woman.

28) Cf. Folklore No. 2758, σ. 275 (G. K. Spyridakis), (21).

29) Cf. A. Passow, *Popularia carmina Graeciae recentioris*, Lipsiae 1860, No. 468, p. 13 f., Folklore No. 9, σ. 155-156 (M. Salvanos), (10).

not give approval to the proposed marriage; and what is more: male members of the family too may have a say on the matter. The reason seems to be that brothers often contribute to their sister's dowry³⁰). Often the boy expects his mother to find a suitable bride for him, and will complain to his mother if she does not do so³¹!

Family decisions are based upon certain considerations which often conflict with the wishes of the person directly affected by such decisions, and the consequences are often disastrous as already indicated above. The question of dowry is crucial, and it has always been for the Greek woman since the seventh century B.C.³²) A woman provided with a good dowry can have a better chance to marry the man preferred by her family. In a song called 'The Killing of the Sister'³³), a girl is killed by her brothers because she refuses to accept the family's decision concerning dowry arrangements³⁴). The girl says (v. 24):

ποῦ ἐμένα μὲ σκοτώσατε γὰρ μιά μικρὴν ἀγάπη
(‘you killed me for my humble love’).

The family will usually agree with the girl's choice if certain conditions are met (social status, etc.), but if the man demands too much, they will reject him, thus breaking the girl's heart³⁵). The

30) Cf. v. 12 and below.

31) Cf. Folklore No. 2321 σ. 9 (A. Trakakis), 1959 (2): "Ε, μίνα παραπονοῦμαι σου γιατί δὲ μὲ παντρεύεις. The mother will ask her son if there is a girl in his life and even say that she will give her to him (v. 2). She also says so when her daughter is in love but does not keep her promise.

32) In this context see J. P. Vernant, *Le mariage en Grèce archaïque*, La Parola d. Pas. 48–49 (1973), 63 ff.; A. R. W. Harrison, *The Law of Athens*, Oxford 1968, 45 ff., with bibliography, and W. Erdmann, *Die Ehe im alten Griechenland* (Münchener Beiträge zur Papyrusforschung und antiken Rechtsgeschichte, Heft 20), München 1934, pp. 212 ff.

33) Cf. G. K. Martzoukos, *Κερκυραϊκά δημοτικά τραγούδια*, Athens 1959, p. 55 (Ἐπύλλ. 3, 11), (4).

34) Some Greek women must have done so since ancient times. Plutarch, Solon 20, quotes a law that protected the love between man and woman against the demands of dowry, stipulating that a marriage should not become a matter of money: οὐ γὰρ ἐβούλετο μισθοφόρον οὐδ' ὄνιον εἶναι τὸν γάμον, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τεκνώσει καὶ χάριτι καὶ φιλότῃ γίνεσθαι τὸν ἀνδρὸς καὶ γυναικὸς συνοικισμὸν. Cf. also Plato, *Laws* vi, 774d. In this context cf. also Erdmann, *op.cit.* 149 n. 14.

35) A girl is told that she cannot marry the son of a priest because his dowry demands are excessive. Cf. "Υλη ἀρ. 2086 (M. Basileiou), 1888 (Ἐρ. B-13), (5). A prince wants to marry her, but she does not want him. Greek parents, and families at large, were troubled with this problem since the days of Hesiod at least (cf. Lacey, *op.cit.* 109 ff., who concentrates on the classical period).

girl will beg her mother, who often speaks for the family, to give in to the man's demands, and she will even say that she will make it up to her³⁶! The girl who loves or likes a man very much will go as far as to ask her mother to promise the man what he wants but not keep her promise³⁷!

The Greek girl is aware of the problem her family faces, and contributes towards her own dowry by working for instance at the loom as the girl in Sappho's poem does³⁸). But when love smites her, and love is passionate, as some songs, including Sappho's, indicate, there arise serious conflicts between the girl and her family, and the experience is always traumatic for the girl; if she does not suffer from depression, she dies.

II

We have now seen that certain social factors can, and often do, interfere adversely with a woman's love. The folk singer is susceptible to the problem which creates tensions within the family, but he does not, as a rule, dwell on the social circumstances, presumably because his audiences are familiar with them³⁹). So he will not always say why, for example, a mother rejects the man her daughter loves. Focus point of the song is the girl's reaction to the unfavourable interferences, whatever they might be socially, and, as already indicated, the reaction is always a heartbreak which may even lead to death as we shall presently see.

Before we discuss the effect which such interferences have upon the girl, mentally and physically, let us first point out that unfavourable social circumstances existed for the Greek woman in

36) Cf. I. K. Martzoukos, *Κερκυραϊκά δημοτικά τραγούδια*, Athens 1959, p. 126 f. (11), v. 15. Cf. further *Folklore ἀρ.* 1422 E σ. 385 (M. Lioudakis) ('Ερ. B-13), (8) and ἀρ. 9, σ. 155-156 (M. Salvanou), ('Ερ. B-13), (10) which are versions of the same theme.

37) Cf. E. Spandonidou, *Κρητικά τραγούδια*, Athens 1935, p. 17, No. 13.

38) Cf. *Folklore ἀρ.* 1370 σ. 83 (P. G. Staras), 1939 (43), in which a man tells the girl to throw away her spindle because she does not need a dowry; her beauty is dowry enough. Traditionally, embroidery, needlework and tapestry-weaving were the Greek woman's occupation (cf. *Il.* Γ 125 ff., Z 491 ἰστόν τ' ἠλακάτην τε, Euripides, *Hecuba* 466 ff., etc.).

39) We should remember that in rural communities, whether in ancient or in modern Greece, people know about other people's business as they are well informed about persons and happenings. Both the lyric poet and the folk singer take this fact into consideration when they compose.

Sappho's time as well, though we do not have concrete historical evidence. The fact alone that marriages were arranged by parents⁴⁰), should be considered sufficient proof, and tensions were surely created when the girl's wishes conflicted with those of her parents⁴¹). In Archilochus' poetry a reference was made to a betrothal that was dissolved because the girl's father apparently decided to give his daughter to another man⁴²).

For well-known reasons the average Greek family did not grant its daughters freedom of choice before marriage, which concerns us in the present context, though some women of aristocratic families would seem to be able to choose a husband⁴³). The problem arises when a woman is free to love⁴⁴) but not free to marry the man she loves, and the average Greek woman has certainly faced this problem from Sappho's time on, if not earlier.

40) Cf. Xenoph. Oecon. VII 10. In this context see also Harrison, *op.cit.* 1 ff. Erdmann, *op.cit.* 228, who quotes Stob.flor. LXXIV 7 (ἔστω σοι πύσις οὗτος, ὃν ἂν κερῖνωσι τοκήεις), and Lacey, *op.cit.* 107 ff., who also notes, with reference to Hdt. VI 122 and Plut. Cimon IV 7 and 9, that some women have chosen their own husbands; they belonged to the highest social class and were very few.

41) These tensions do not come to light, in contemporary literature, in the form they do in folk songs, but they exist as the drama of Euripides well indicates. The classic example is Medea's complaint that a woman has to buy her own master (Eur. Medea 231 ff.).

42) For a discussion of the relevant material with bibliography see my book, *op.cit.* 33 ff. It has been suggested that the new suitor was richer (cf. M. Treu, Archilochos, München 1959, p. 223), which makes good sense in view of the fact that financial considerations were crucial to a paternal decision on marriage matters. In Sappho (fr. 109 LP) a father, who seems to speak for the whole family, is apparently consenting to his daughter's marriage when he says δώσομεν. The theme may be mythical (Treu, Sappho, München ²1958, p. 225), but Sappho handles the myth. The point is that the father speaks and decides.

43) For some well-known cases see Herodotus and Plutarch quoted in n. 40 above. These cases should, however, not suggest the rule. For Herodotus tells us also that Cleisthenes, the tyrant of Sicyon, c. 600 B.C., rejected Hippocleides, an Athenian favoured suitor for the hand of his daughter, because he did not like his manners (VI 120). That the freedom of aristocratic women was very delicate is best shown after marriage as Medea's speech indicates (n. 41 above) and the numerous conflicts in Euripidean drama confirm. In this context cf. Simon *op.cit.* 244 ff., 258 f.

44) There were occasions for men and women to see each other and fall in love. Religious festivals, certain public events and activities outside the home provided such occasions. In this context see L. A. Schneider, Zur sozialen Bedeutung der archaischen Korenstatuen (Hamburger Beiträge zur Archäologie, Beiheft 2), Hamburg 1975, p. 5 ff., who quotes sources, including Sappho and Alcaeus, for the 7th and 6th centuries B. C., and Erdmann, *op.cit.* 152 ff., with reference to classical and post classical times.

How she coped with this problem emotionally, not only socially, we do not hear often in contemporary literature, presumably because few men, if any, cared about it, considering the typical male's attitude toward women⁴⁵). Sappho seems to be the first woman poet to allude to the problem. The Greek folk song is explicit about this, as already indicated above.

It may be true that Aeolian women have enjoyed freedom in Sappho's days⁴⁶), perhaps more freedom than their Athenian counterparts, but that freedom did not, as a rule, extend to their marrying the man they loved, and is, therefore, to be sought in other areas which do not concern us here⁴⁷).

The rejection of a suitor by the family, for any of a variety of reasons, would be a heartbreak for the girl, especially if she were in love with him or liked him, and the experience would be more traumatic if the girl realized that the chances to marry were slim or non-existent. In a society in which marriage was, more or less, a business transaction or proposition, and the disadvantages for many men and women were not few, the situation could be very desperate indeed for the woman whose social position and self-esteem depended very heavily on having a husband⁴⁸). The following folk song best tells us how a woman feels when she find herself without a husband:

Μάννα, για δὲ μὲ πάντρευες ὅτι ἤμουνε στὸν καιρὸ μου,
τώρα, μαννούλα μ'ἔρασα κ' ἀσπίσαν τὰ μαλλιά μου,
κανένας δὲ μὲ θέλει, κανεὶς δὲ μὲ ζυγώνει.
Τὸ μῆλο πάνου στῆ μηλιά, τὸ παραγινωμένο
ἢ χάνεται ἢ σώνεται ἢ τὰ πουλιά τὸ τρῶνε
ἔτσι κ' ἡ κόρη ἀνύπανδρη ποὺ παραμεγαλώνει

(‘Mother, why did you not give me in marriage when it was still time. Now, mother, I am old and my hair has gone gray. No one wants me, no one is running after me. The apple on the apple tree, which is overripe, either perishes or is picked or the birds eat it, and so is also the unmarried maiden who grows older’)⁴⁹).

45) In this context cf. Marilyn B. Arthur, *Origins of the Western Attitude toward Women*, Arethusa 6 (1973) 7 ff.

46) Cf. D. L. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus*, Oxford 1959, 22. Yet cf. also M. B. Arthur, *op.cit.* 42 ff., and Erdmann, *op.cit.* 13 ff.

47) One might look for their freedom in certain activities outside the home. Cf. n. 44 above.

48) Cf. Simon, *op.cit.* 250. This was still so in the nineteenth-century America. See Smith-Rosenberg, *op.cit.* 659.

49) Folklore No. 1479 H' σ.195 (M. Ioannidou), 1942, (13).

The simile of the ripe apple⁵⁰) occurs in Sappho as well (fr. 105 LP), where the bride is likened to a red apple:

οἶον τὸ γλυκύμαλον ἐρεύθεται ἄκρωι ἐπ' ὕδωι κτλ.

The folk song indicates what usually happens to a woman who does not have much say on love and marriage. Whether the pickers (suitors) see the red apple (maiden) on the top of the tree (home), is one thing; whether they will pick it, is still another. A lot depends upon who sees it and who is chosen to pick it. If no one is chosen, the apple will overripe and perish.

What it means to grow old without a husband, is more explicitly stated in another folk song in which the unmarried girl complains to her mother and says, in the following lines, that it breaks her heart to see that her companions are already married and have children at school:

βλέπω τὰ συνομήλικα μ' καὶ καίγεται ἡ καρδιά μου,
πῶχουν ἄντρα 'ς τὴν ἀγκαλιά, 'ς τὸ δάσκαλο παιδάκια⁵¹).

Note in particular: 'they have a man to hug'. It is then loneliness that tortures the unmarried woman⁵²) but there is more: she does not have children and so she does not have the social position which a mother has.

There should be little doubt that the average woman in Sappho's days must have faced the same dreadful prospects of being alone, unmarried and childless. The problem is that contemporary poets, whether 'bourgeois' or aristocratic, did not write much about this aspect of a woman's life, and this is of course not surprising, considering the overall attitude of poets towards women⁵³). The 'wretched woman' in Alcaeus⁵⁴) seems to me to allu-

50) Cf. further Ὕλη ἀρ. 1309, 1938 (Ἐρ. B-23), (14).

51) Folklore No. 377 σ. 4 (Ch. K. Priakos, 1922 (Ἐρ. B-23), (12). In verse 5 she complains that her mother did not marry her away when she was at the right age, and in v. 3 we are told that while some women are hungry and thirsty, some other women want to get married.

52) The feeling of loneliness is most beautifully expressed by Sappho in fr. 168 B V.: δέδυκε μὲν ἃ σελάννα / καὶ Πληιάδες· μέσαι δὲ / νύκτες, παρὰ δ' ἔρχεται ὥρα: / ἔγω δὲ μόνα κατεύδω. Cf. my book, *op.cit.* 76.

53) In this context cf. M. B. Arthur, *op.cit.* 45 ff., with particular reference to Hesiod and lyric poets. While aristocratic lyric idealizes sexual and procreative aspects of women, bourgeois poetry condemns women and only sparingly praises them.

54) Cf. fr. 10 B LP quoted on page 3 above.

de to this dreadful reality. If we had more of the work of the Aeolian poets, we might find more revealing utterances about the frustration, disappointment and even anxiety which women experienced, and Sappho, a married woman⁵⁵), would certainly remember; her *epithalamia* reveal an important aspect of her personal and poetic interests.

Affective reactions to socially-conditioned situations abound in folk song, as has been indicated above, and we should now consider whether the *affective reaction* in Sappho's poem is also so conditioned. We first note that the heart is adversely affected: In (12), v.8 quoted above, the heart is burning (καίγεται), which expresses a feeling of bitterness and anger, or it is sad (θλιβερό) as in (31), v.5. Physical manifestations of grief are present. Weeping is stressed⁵⁶), the girl falls ill (πέφτει και άρρωστᾶ)⁵⁷) or lives with πίκρες και χολές⁵⁸). Now 'bitterness and bile' are associated with depressed and fearful states⁵⁹), and the folk singer need not dwell on somatic symptoms of these states. Besides, the way individuals experience and express their depressed state is influenced, to a significant degree, by cultural patterns⁶⁰), and we see this in song and poetry, notwithstanding style and poetic intentions⁶¹). A woman who says that she has gone mad because she cannot marry the man she loves⁶²) tells us a lot about how she feels and what the physical manifestations of her state are likely to be. The same is true of the woman who says that she is going to die for the same reasons⁶³).

The Greek folk singer is aware of the depth of despair and anxiety which women experience in such situations, just as women are aware of the social factors that cause their trouble, and his song essentially presents a moment of crisis. Sappho's poem too presents a similar moment.

55) Cf. the bibliographical entry in the Suda.

56) Cf. the poems quoted above: (25), (26), (27), (38), (32), (33), (34).

57) Cf. v. 8 of the 'Theonitsa' song (35).

58) Cf. v. 2 of the 'Adonitsa' song (36), (37) and also of the 'Theonitsa' song (38).

59) Cf. Simon, *op.cit.* 235, and the entire ch. 12, pp. 228 ff., entitled Aristotle on Melancholy.

60) Cf. Fabrega, *op.cit. passim*.

61) In this context cf. my paper *op. cit.* 116.

62) Cf. v. 7 of the 'Dienitsa' song (31).

63) Cf. v. 13 of the 'Adonitsa' song (36).

III

In Sappho's poem we have an emotional breakdown which is not unlike the *affective reactions* of heterosexual women in Greek folk songs, with due allowance made of course for style and form⁶⁴). What breaks the woman's heart καρδίαν ἐν στήθεσιν ἐπτόαισεν⁶⁵) is what she sees, and what she sees is a man and a woman sitting together and responding to each other lovingly. I have shown that much has been neglected that cannot be overlooked. Any interpretation of this phrase, as well as of the vexed τό⁶⁶), must take into consideration that the speaker is looking at a young couple which points to a permanent relationship in marriage (given the social conditions in the sixth century Lesbos), and this is the hard reality for the speaker, whatever may be said about Sappho's response to beauty and the like. Sappho, if she is the speaker, is not only looking at a beautiful girl; she is looking at the one who won a man (perhaps with her beauty though marriages were not, as a rule, arranged on the basis of looks alone), and this circumstance is most essential to the proper understanding of the poem.

Whatever emotions the girl may arouse in the speaker, those emotions cannot be seen in isolation from the concrete situation, i. e. from the girl's sitting with the man. The girl's charms do not become otiose details if τὸ refers, as I have previously argued, to the entire scene, for they do, first and foremost, have their effect upon the man (ἰσθάνει, ὑπακούει).

This poem should of course not be interpreted in isolation from the *Ode to Aphrodite* (fr.1) in which Sappho invokes the goddess of love to help her win a girl's love, but also not in isolation from the *epithalamia* or from those poems which speak of loneliness and of a girl's love for a boy⁶⁷). Obviously, Sappho talked about different aspects of love, and, above all, she did not

64) Cf. my paper, *op.cit.* 106 ff.

65) For an interpretation see my paper, *op.cit.* 100 ff., and note in particular λιγώνεται ἡ καρδιά μου (my heart is choking) v. 7 of the folk song quoted on p. 111. We have seen above (p. 12) how the heart is always affected adversely. Cf. also ἐκόπηκε ἡ καρδιά μου (my heart is broken) v. 5 of the song quoted below p. 14.

66) E. Robbin, *Every Time I look at You: Sappho Thirty One*, TAPA 110 (1980) 255 ff., gives a summary of the various views.

67) Cf. p. 3 and p. 11 n. 52 above.

always talk about her own experiences⁶⁸). That her poetry was also rooted in society is evident in numerous fragments⁶⁹).

The situation involves a woman, who could be Sappho herself or any of her friends and associates, and she addresses herself openly to the woman sitting with the man. The openness and intimacy of her feelings is certainly remarkable, but we find the same in folk songs⁷⁰) from which we learn more about the nature of the emotions expressed as well as about what caused them.

Now that we know that a Greek woman's failure to get married, for the reasons discussed above, can cause her to express emotions like those Sappho presents, we can, and should, explore new avenues for a better understanding of Sappho's poems, and, by extension, her poetry. The woman who loves a man but cannot marry him will not address herself to the man, if he is not the cause for her setback. She will address her own heart⁷¹), as in the following song, or she may, as in Sappho, address the lucky woman who becomes, by necessity, her competitor.

Καρδιά μου, τί βαριοχτυπᾶς καὶ τί ᾽σαι μαραμμένη
 σάμπως νὰ πᾶς ἀνήφορο, βαρέλι φορτωμένη;
 Κάλλιο τό ᾽χω νὰ πῆγαινα βαρέλι ζαλωμένη,
 παρὰ τὸ κακὸ πῶπαθα τῆ σημερινῆ ἡμέρα.
 Λυθήκανε τὰ πόδια μου, ἐκόπηκε ἡ καρδιά μου,
 παντρεύεται ἡ ἀγάπη μου κι ἄλλη γυναίκα παίρνει

(‘Why do you, my heart, beat so hard and why are you so shriveled, as if you were to go uphill heavily laden? I would prefer to go uphill heavily laden and not to suffer the misfortune that I suffered today. My legs are feeble, my heart is broken, for my love is marrying and takes another woman’⁷²).

The woman is almost suffering a syncope (v. 5, ἐκόπηκε ἡ καρδιά μου), which the psychiatrist Devereux diagnosed for Sappho⁷³), and it is here, but not in Sappho, that we learn the reason why the woman suffers. This self-expression does still not explain

68) Cf. my book, *op. cit.* 69 ff., and esp. pp. 77–81 for textual evidence.

69) Cf. esp. fr. 5 and 15 LP in which she speaks about her brother Charaxus and his affairs.

70) Cf. the five-stanza song quoted and discussed in my paper, *op. cit.* 111.

71) It may be noted that Archilochus addresses his θυμός in the hour of personal need (cf. fr. 128 W.), as did Odysseus (v 18 ff.), but Sappho too knows the Selbstgespräch (cf. fr. 65, 1 LP, and 133 V.; in my book, *op. cit.* 58).

72) Cf. Folklore No. 2200, σ. 26 (A. Tselalis), 1936 (‘Eφ. B-127), (42).

73) Cf. his paper CQ XXI (1970), p. 19, and my paper, *op. cit.* 112.

why the Sapphic speaker suffers but it surely helps us see and evaluate another important aspect of the emotional breakdown which Sappho presents in her poem.

A woman lost the man she loved to another woman, and we now know the probable reasons: family influence, and a disadvantageous bargaining position. The situation was not much different in the seventh century Lesbos though the reasons for the woman's breakdown in Sappho's poem may not necessarily be social, if in fact the woman does, as I believe, feel that she has lost a chance, or perhaps one more chance, to get married. We have seen above that the Greek woman's failure to marry the man she loves can cause her to suffer and even die.

Noteworthy in Sappho's poem is the hope which is expressed at the point where the poem breaks:

ἀλλὰ πᾶν τόλματον ἐπεὶ ἴκαι πένητα†

The usual rendering of πᾶν τόλματον is 'everything is endurable' and ἐπεὶ should introduce a reason in the fifth stanza⁷⁴). West sees in καὶ πένητα the reason, or as he puts it 'all that survives of the reason', and quotes Theognis (v. 657 ff.). But the fact that Theognis speaks of the πενιχρὸς ἀνὴρ who becomes rich and of the rich who loses everything and ascribes all this to the gods, does not necessarily give us the right clue to the meaning of πένητα. Theognis' problems and worries were not Sappho's⁷⁵). In Theognis too it is the ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός who endures (ἐπεὶ ἔστ' ἀνδρὸς πάντα φέρειν ἀγαθοῦ, 658) but he is the man upon whom the gods bestowed gifts – an idea that goes back to Homer – and the two thoughts, namely the enduring spirit of the nobles and the power of the gods to make a man rich and a rich poor, are hardly relevant to Sappho's poem as we know it.

Whatever the gnomic utterance of the fifth stanza, if there was one⁷⁶), πένητα should refer to the speaker, and its meaning should be derived from the present context as Milne rightly suggested⁷⁷). Why is she a πένης? She lost in the bid for love and, as I have argued, for marriage. If the man is ὄλβιος, and the woman

74) Cf. M. L. West, *Burning Sappho*, *Maia* 22 (1970), 312 ff.

75) In this context see my book, *op.cit.* 91 ff.

76) H. Fränkel, *Dichtung und Philosophie des frühen Griechentums*, München ²1963, p. 200, says "unser Text bricht an der Stelle ab, wo die Sprecherin begonnen hat aus einem gewissen Abstand auf das Ereignis zu reflektieren".

77) Cf. H. T. M. Milne, *Hermes* 71 (1936), 128.

sitting next to him no less ὄλβιος, she is not; she is quite the opposite, but she can endure her misfortune and some day she too might be ὄλβιος, i. e. she might get married. Obviously some woman could not endure as we may learn from the Greek folk song. Max Treu correctly observes that τόλματον is a call to τλημοσύνη⁷⁸). Long before Sappho, people encouraged themselves to stand up to painful and unpleasant experiences; so says Odysseus τέτλαθι δὴ κραδίη (v 18).

It is also possible that πένητα might allude to the speaker's social background⁷⁹), which would, *inter alia*, explain why she lost. We have seen that a girl not suitably dowered cannot marry the man she loves or likes⁸⁰). But I feel that πένητα tells us about her condition as it relates to her experience; there is hope if she endures⁸¹). At the present she cannot do much to change what has been, but she cannot help feeling as she does. I find this feeling in a distich which I quoted elsewhere:

Ζηλεύει ἡ χαμηλὴ κορφὴ νὰ φτάξῃ τὴν ἀπάνω
ζηλεύω καὶ σὶ ἀντροίνα μᾶντα μορῶ νὰ κάμω⁸²).

It should be noted that the speaker is, in the same context, also jealous of pretty girls because she is ugly⁸³). This would seem to explain why she is not married. Yet what can she do? The idea of enduring her lot is implicit in her words. In another song called 'The Lovers'⁸⁴) a girl feels deserted by the man she loves and wants to marry; she falls ill, and some companions come to comfort her. They point out to her that they too experienced love, grief and loss, but they – and this is now the important point – hardened their heart, and so of course they endured: Μᾶχαμε σι-

78) M. Treu, Sappho, München ²1958, 179.

79) Cf. J. Hemelrijk, Πενία ἐν πλοῦτος, Amsterdam 1925, who refers to lyric poets (pp. 17 f. and 67 f.) but who does not quote Sappho's πένητα.

80) Cf. also my paper, *op.cit.* 112.

81) M. Lefkowitz, Critical Stereotypes and the Poetry of Sappho, GRBS 14 (1973), 121 remarks: "As a woman, she must rely on the special weapons of the oppressed, miracles and patience".

82) Cf. my paper, *loc.cit.* n. 59. In translation: 'A low treetop is jealous of the one above it and tries to catch up with it and I am jealous of married couples but what can I do'.

83) Cf. the distich immediately preceding the one quoted above (*loc.cit.*): Ζηλεύει ἡ χαμηλὴ κορφὴ νὰ φτάξῃ τὴ μεγάλη / Ζηλεύει καὶ ἡ ἄσκημη τῆς ὁμορφῆς τὰ κάλλη ('As a low treetop is jealous of a higher one and tries to catch up with it so is the ugly girl jealous of the beautiful one').

84) Cf. A. Passow, *op.cit.* No. 437, p. 315.

δερή καρδιάν, σκρότια μαραμένα (v. 8): 'But we (in contrast to you) had a heart of iron, although our insides hurt (affected by grief)'. To harden one's heart to survive the onslaught of love is another way of saying τόλματον.

In more tragic situations there seems to be no hope for the girl as we see in the folk songs discussed above; she cannot bear her misfortune and dies⁸⁵). But Sappho is writing poetry and she wants women to face up to all kinds of misfortunes that befall them.

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85) The wish to die is not absent from Sappho's poetry. Cf. fr. 94 LP and my paper, *op.cit.* 110.