SAPPHO FR.96 LP

The simile in Sappho fr.96 LP has been the subject of much discussion. I should like to add to this discussion yet another suggestion, which I hope will commend itself by its simplicity.

The fragment opens with a mention of Sardis (probably) and a reference to a female there whose thoughts stray to Lesbos. This female honoured the addressee of the poem like a goddess, and delighted in her song. But now she is among the Lydians. Here the simile begins:

νῦν δὲ Λύδαισιν ἐμπρέπεται γυναί-
κεσσιν ὥς ποτ' ἀελίω
δύντος ἀ βροδοδάκτυλος σελάννα[1]
πάντα περρέχοισ' ἄστρα· φάος δ' ἐπί-
σχει θάλασσαν ἐπ' ἀλμύραν
ἴσως καὶ πολυανθέμοις ἀρούραις·
ἀ δ' ἐέρσα κάλα κέχυται, τεθά-
λαισι δὲ βρόδα κἄπαλ' ἄν-
θρυσκα καὶ μελίλωτος ἀνθεμώδης

Then in line 15 we come back to the absent girl:

πόλλα δὲ ζαφοίταισ' ἀγάνας ἐπι-
μνάσθεισ' Ἀτθιδος ἰμέρωι
λέπταν ποι φρένα κ[·]ρ. . . βόρηται.

The opening of the simile is obviously relevant enough. The absent girl is the moon, the Lydian women the stars.[2] But with line 9 we seem to move beyond a strict one-to-one comparison. The light on the sea and fields, the dew, the growing plants, have no counterpart in the real situation of the poem. Why does the simile ramble on in this way?

The most common explanation, with variations, is that the imaginary moon of the simile becomes the real moon, in whose light the girl wanders restlessly (lines 15 ff.), thinking of Atthis. The imaginary night becomes the real night of unsatisfied longing.[3] But Sir Denys Page observes: 'This notion is not unattractive in itself, but it cannot be claimed that there is anything in the text to suggest

[1] On this verse see in general E. Heitsch, *Hermes* 95 (1967), 391 f. For Sappho's indifference to realism in descriptions of nature see G. M. Kirkwood, *Early Greek Monody* (Ithaca and London, 1974), p.261 n.49.

[2] Those who wish may make Atthis, the addressee, the sun which has set, with H. Saake, *Sappho Studien* (Paderborn, 1972), p.82 n.130, C. W. McCleod, *ZPE* 15 (1974), 219 f. The girl is pre-eminent, but only in the absence of the more beautiful Atthis, or she is pre-eminent but lonely, for she does not have Atthis with her. But in the context of praise of the absent girl too precise a reading of the text is dangerous. Probably ἀελίω δύντος merely sets the scene, like the many details of the Homeric simile which 'enhance the total picture' without having any co-ordinate in the real situation (M. Coffey, *AJP* 78 (1957), 117); cf. e.g. Ibycus, *PMG* 287.6 f., σὺν ὄχεσφι θοοῖς.

[3] So e.g. U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Sappho und Simonides* (Berlin, 1913), p.54, A. Turyn, *Studia Sapphica* (Eus suppl. 1929), pp. 59–65, H. Saake, *Zur Kunst Sapphos* (Paderborn, 1971), pp. 169 f.

or support it.'[4] More recently, C. W. McCleod[5] has suggested that the simile is intended to offer two contrasts to the actual situation. The moon has a nourishing effect, making the plants grow through the dew which accompanies it ('saltus reficit iam roscida luna', Virg. *G*.3.337), while the absent girl pines away (line 17), and the moon is omnipresent, while the girl has a sense of loss (15 ff.). But if this is the case it is surprising that Sappho makes no attempt to point the contrast. Elsewhere, when Sappho wishes to stress the relevance of a central excursus she does so quite clearly at the point of transition back to the concrete situation; so *καὶ νῦν* 1.25, *κἄμε νῦν* 16.15, *νῦν δέ* 17.11. But when Sappho returns to the present in fr.96, she says not *ἀ δέ*, which would bring out the contrast with the the moon, but *πόλλα δέ ζαφοίταισα*, which by ignoring the simile suggests that no new fact has been added since *ἐμπρέπεται*.

It is also suggested, though this view has met with little success, that the simile is like those comparatively rare Homeric similes which break free from the narrative situation.[6] The simile begins as a comparison, but the original points of reference are lost to sight as the poem proceeds. Since, as Page says, Sappho does not link the end of the simile to the actual situation, I can see no real alternative to this view. But the question remains: why? We cannot suppose that Sappho is carried away by the image she has created. This explanation will suffice for the oral poet, but in Sappho's case it can apply only to the moment of creation; it does not explain why Sappho allowed the simile to stand once created. Elsewhere Sappho knows what she wants to say and how to say it most effectively. If she allowed the simile to stand, that must be because she felt that it was effective. And the source of its effect, I would suggest, is its factual irrelevance.

At the opening of the poem Sappho is reassuring Atthis that the girl misses Atthis as much (we suppose) as Atthis (and perhaps Sappho) misses her. The absent girl often directs her thoughts to Lesbos (line 2), just as she showed special respect to Atthis while on Lesbos (3–5). But now this girl of surpassing beauty is to be found in Lydia, not on Lesbos. The simile begins as an expression of the girl's beauty. Even in the part which *is* strictly relevant the simile attains (for lyric poetry) Homeric proportions. Like most 'Homeric' similes in small-scale archaic poetry, it is a variation on an Homeric image.[7] And like most 'Homeric' similes in small-scale poetry it is used for special effect, here to create an impression of almost superhuman beauty. Here Sappho gives telling expression to the extent of their loss. But Sappho's aim is to comfort Atthis, not to cause her pain. Therefore she extends the image. Where before the moon had a specific application, here Sappho divorces it from the contemporary situation and concentrates on an imaginary scene. Where before she stressed beauty and separation, here she creates a picture of pure natural beauty. She conjures up a landscape which is totally without emotion, and totally uninhabited by human beings;[8]

[4] Denys Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (Oxford, 1955), p.94. T. McEvilley, *Hermes* 101 (1973), 274, objects that since this is poetry Sappho need not make her point explicitly. A reasonable objection, but the simple fact is that from line 9 we move further and further from the actual situation; the feminine participle in line 9 does not lead naturally to the feminine participle in line 15 (*pace* McEvilley, p.276), since as well as the distance between the two and the new subjects introduced we have another feminine in line 12, *ἐέρσα*.

[5] n.2 above.

[6] So Page, p.94, D. A. Campbell, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (New York, 1967), pp. 279 f.

[7] It seems to be based on *Il*.8.555–9. So e.g. Tyrt. 20W, 9–14 is a fusion of *Il*. 6.506 ff., 22.23 ff., and Sappho 105c varies *Il*.8.306 ff.

[8] Contrast Homer's *γέγηθε δέ τε φρένα ποιμήν*, *Il*.8.559.

and while the poetess and her addressee concentrate on this hypnotic, purely pictorial description, all emotion is drained from the poem. The picture has a distancing effect. The image which at first threatened to overthrow the emotional balance of the poem is now used to redress that balance. This is why the second, 'irrelevant', part of the simile is so long, while the first, the 'relevant', part is by comparison so short.

Now that distance from painful emotion has been won, Sappho may proceed to deal with the situation in a more practical way. She returns to the thoughts expressed at the opening of the fragment. The absent girl wanders to and fro, filled with longing for Atthis. The rest of the poem is unclear. Lines 21–3 return to 4–5. Lines 26–7 (and perhaps the verses before and after) seem to refer to earlier occasions they had all enjoyed together, perhaps as an antidote to grief, just as in fr.94 Sappho uses the past to counteract the painful present.[9]

The poem proceeds in two movements. Sappho comforts the girl in two ways, firstly in a manner which appeals to the emotions, then with appeal to reason.

I do not mean to assert that Sappho thought objectively, as she wrote, along the lines I have argued. All I have done is to show what I think takes place. Sappho did not approach the poem in a scientific spirit. Rather, she intuitively sought a means of checking emotion and preventing a single, self-indulgent lamentation of loss from dominating the whole poem. Such a procedure would harmonize with the rest of Sappho's poetry. Sappho never burdens the listener with an uncontrolled expression of her emotions, however powerful these may be. Instead she seeks a means of objectifying or generalizing her experience. The means by which she does so may vary from poem to poem. In fr.31, in which she describes her reactions to the sight of a girl she loves, she uses as a steadying medium the Homeric technique of listing bodily reactions in a purely objective manner to create a forceful impression of emotional disturbance. Poem 1, a poem of hope in a situation of despair, concentrates attention not on the anguish of the present but on her hope for the future, dramatized by the description of the relationship between Sappho and Aphrodite which justifies this hope. In fr.16, Sappho sets her longing for Anactoria in a mythic context,[10] and so relates her personal experience to the combined human experience.[11] The simile in fr.96 is another steadying framework in which to set an emotional experience.

The imperceptible shift in the function of the simile, from relevance to 'irrelevance', is close to the shift in the reference of the myth in fr.16, where the role

[9] It is possible that the poem ends at line 23, or even at 20, in which case the form of Sappho's poem will be like that of Alcaeus 130 LP (see below). But the ringing between lines 3–5 and 21–3 suggests that the poem continued at least till 23. The kinship of motif between 96.24–9 and fr. 2.13–16, which presumably concerns some communal activity of Sappho's circle, may suggest that lines 24–9 of this fragment deal with the activity of the group, as fr.94.12 ff; in view of the similarity of situation in fragments 94 and 96 (loss of a loved one), it is not improbable that the comfort offered is similar.

[10] Theognis 1345–50 shows the same movement from proposition through *exemplum* to personal experience as we find in this poem, and may be influenced by Sappho.

[11] I have treated these poems briefly, since the basic similarity of procedure is discussed fully by Kirkwood, pp. 104–22. Kirkwood himself suggests (p.109) that the simile in fr.96 'implies the universality of the beauty of which Atthis' beloved is a particular, contemporary, and momentary fulfilment'. But again, why does Sappho divert attention from the moon? Contrast Alcaeus 326 LP, where the details of the metaphor reinforce the basic mood of danger and confusion. Also, would the implication console Atthis?

of Helen, who is cited as an example of the lover, becomes ambiguous as the myth proceeds, occupying a place somewhere between Sappho, the lover, and Anactoria, the beloved.[12] Both simile and myth are developed in a manner which is intuitive and illogical, but poetically effective. Very similar is the account of past pleasures in fr.94 (lines 12 ff.), which, though introduced as an account of Sappho's attempt to comfort her friend, acquires the further, implicit function of consoling Sappho.

Thus the use of the image of the moonlight and dew to arrest and drain the emotion of the poem, and the fluidity in the function of the image, would not be unusual for Sappho. The technique used, the distancing picture, is employed on occasion by Horace as a means of ending a poem.[13] But can an archaic poet exploit irrelevance in this way?

In his *Fourth Nemean*, Pindar gives a catalogue of the 'rule', whether literal or in the form of cult, of the sons of Aeacus. This catalogue occupies lines 44–53. It is followed by the myth of Peleus, which, though formally linked to the list at line 68 (*δῶρα καὶ κράτος ἐξέφαναν ἐγγενὲς αὐτῶι*), is developed as an independent *exemplum* and offered as a parallel to the victor's experience.[14] To signal to his audience that the list has come to an end, Pindar develops the last item (Neoptolemus) far beyond what is necessary or relevant:

> Νεοπτόλεμος δ' ἀπείρωι διαπρυσίαι (κρατεῖ),
> βουβόται τόθι πρῶνες ἔξοχοι κατάκεινται
> Δωδώναθεν ἀρχόμενοι πρὸς Ἰόνιον πόρον.

Here, as in Sappho's poem, an elaborate visual scene is used as a means of gaining distance.

Closer to Sappho, since the situation is again emotional, is Alcaeus 130 LP. The fragment first becomes intelligible at line 16. The tone is one of undiluted self-pity. I am thrust out in the wilds, Alcaeus complains, yearning to see the assembly and the council summoned. I am driven from the rights my ancestors enjoyed, out in the middle of nowhere. Then the text becomes obscure. When it again becomes legible, we find Alcaeus saying, (31) that he dwells keeping clear of trouble

> *ὄππαι Λεσβίαδες κρωνόμεναι φύαν*
> *πώλεντ' ἐλκεσίπεπλοι, περὶ δὲ βρέμει*
> *ἄχω θεσπεσία γυναίκων*
> *ἴρας ὀλολύγας ἐνιαυσίας.*

The final stanza seems to return to the poet's problems ('When will the gods free me from my troubles?'). Bowra[15] observes: 'In his exile Alcaeus enjoys the spectacle of the girls who compete for prizes in beauty in an annual competition. His mind turns happily to this from his regrets and complaints, and for a moment he catches its excitement and its clamour.' Just as Sappho turns her attention from the unhappy present to the beauty and continuity (*τεθάλαισι* 12 f.) of nature,

[12] See Saake, *Sappho Studien*, pp. 72 f., McCleod (n.2 above), pp. 217 f.

[13] See S. Commager, *The Odes of Horace* (New Haven and London, 1962), pp. 143 f., 253 f., and cf. C.1.4 fin., 4.2 fin. For an example within a poem see G. Williams, *The Third Book of Horace's Odes* (Oxford, 1969), p.148.

[14] See A. Köhnken, *Die Funktion des Mythos bei Pindar* (Berlin, 1971), pp. 205 ff.

[15] C. M. Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry*[2] (Oxford, 1961), p.147.

so Alcaeus turns from his present misery to the beauty and bustle of the women and the continuity of normal life typified by the ritual (ἐνιαυσίας 35).[16] But as well as offering solace to the dejected exile the verses of Alcaeus may serve an artistic purpose. The description in lines 32–5 is included, I think, because its mood contrasts with that of the rest of the poem. It acts as a brake to the emotion of the poem, exerting a calming influence on the last stanza and so rescuing the poem from unmitigated self-indulgence.

Finally, the same explanation may perhaps be offered for another problematic *excursus* in Sappho. Poem 1 is a prayer to Aphrodite, a request that the goddess release her from the torment of unrequited love. But though Sappho's pain is acute (ἄσαισι, ὀνίαισι 3, χαλέπαν μερίμναν 25 f.), only the first and last stanzas deal directly with her emotions; the only reference to Sappho's pain in the centre of the poem is in the mouth of a sympathetic goddess who refers to help given in the past (δηὖτε 15, 16, 18)[17] and promises help again.[18] The second stanza begins with the hymnal device of citing a previous benefaction. But instead of moving directly to the account of the help Aphrodite gave in the past Sappho describes at length Aphrodite's journey (7–13):

πάτρος δὲ δόμον λίποισα
χρύσιον ἦλθες
ἄρμ' ὑπασδεύξαισα· κάλοι δέ σ' ἆγον
ὤκεες στροῦθοι περὶ γᾶς μελαίνας
πύκνα δίννεντες πτέρ' ἀπ' ὠράνωϊθε-
ρος διὰ μέσσω,
αἶψα δ' ἐξίκοντο·

In a poem of only twenty-eight verses an ecphrasis of this length is surprising; so surprising that one is tempted to accept Page's explanation of the description of Aphrodite's descent as 'a flight of fancy, with much detail irrelevant to her present theme'.[19] But without straining credulity we can, I think, suggest a num-

[16] The contrast between present unhappiness and the order and continuity of another sphere of existence, nature in Sappho, civic ritual in Alcaeus, may contain an implicit statement: 'non, si male nunc, et olim sic erit.'

[17] K. Stanley, *GRBS* 17 (1976), 315 may be right to accept Pages's view (*Sappho and Alcaeus*, pp. 13 ff.) that the triple δηὖτε is indicative of irony. Single δηὖτε may be a mannerism with the lyric poets, but nowhere else is it repeated three times in four verses. Page describes Aphrodite as 'a little impatient, but tolerant, as a mother with a troublesome child'. Such irony and impatience is not inconsistent with affection, nor with Aphrodite's promise of help in lines 21 ff. (see next note); for a similar blend of irony and affection cf. *Il.*16.7 ff.

[18] For a refutation of Page's view of 21 ff. see G. L. Koniaris, *Philologue* 109 (1965), 30 ff., G. A. Privitera, *QUCC* 4 (1967), 38 f., 40 f. Stanley, op. cit., p.316, describes these verses as 'neither a pact to join in the battle nor an explicit promise of aid but rather a simple prediction of the future'. But an unbiased reading of the last stanza (especially καὶ νῦν 25) suggests that the previous visit of Aphrodite is cited as a precedent for the favourable intervention requested in lines 25 ff., i.e. that lines 21–4 are to be taken as an explicit promise of assistance. This, the obvious interpretation, is supported a) by the change in Aphrodite's role from oppressor (δάμνα 3) to ally (σύμμαχος 28), b) by the passages cited by Page, p.17 n.3.

[19] Page, p.18. Stanley, (above n.17), p.312, suggests that 'Sappho imagines Aphrodite equipped for war'. But chariots are not reserved exclusively for military use in Homer; cf. *Il.*8.41 ff., *Od.*3.491 ff., 15.144 ff. At *Il.*5.722 ff. the chariot is not itself warlike; the martial connotations are supplied by the situation, and by the arming of Athene, 733 ff., a scene which has no parallel in Sappho's poem. Stanley denies, 311 f., that the chariot is 'introduced here merely to add grandeur to her epiphany'; but cf. Bacch. 13. 194–5.

ber of reasons for the inclusion of this description. Firstly, the circumstantial description of Aphrodite's journey raises expectations of effective intervention in Sappho's problem by the goddess, as do similar descriptions in epic. Secondly, in stressing that the goddess who visits Sappho is in fact the goddess whom we saw seated in immortal splendour at the opening of the poem it emphasizes the special divine favour which Sappho enjoys and so gives added weight to Aphrodite's promise of help later in the poem. But also, and equally important, it forces Sappho's pain to the periphery of our minds as well as to the periphery of the poem. As we concentrate on the pictorial description, our attention and our vantage point are lifted from the ground to the air through which the goddess moves. We lose the human perspective of Sappho and gain the divine perspective of Aphrodite. In this way Sappho reveals her awareness that this situation, grievous as it is, is merely another of the vicissitudes which vex the painful life of mortals. Just as the continuation of the simile in fr. 96 beyond the point of strict relevance to the actual situation creates the necessary calm in which Sappho may comfort Atthis with appeal to the past, so in Poem 1 the description of Aphrodite's descent diverts attention from Sappho's immediate pain and concentrates it on Aphrodite, the source of Sappho's comfort and confidence.

University of St. Andrews C. CAREY