

“EVERY TIME I LOOK AT YOU . . .”: SAPPHO THIRTY-ONE

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Translators and commentators must all¹ face the problem of the τó of

¹The following bibliography, though not exhaustive, lists the majority of works mentioned in the course of this article. It is meant to include what has been most influential and what is most recent, if germane. Some further material can be found in Saake's books, in the edition of E.-M. Voigt (Amsterdam 1971), and in D. E. Gerber, "Studies in Greek Lyric Poetry: 1967–1975," *CW* 70 (1976) 111–13. All works will hereafter be referred to by author's name or, when necessary, by author's name and short title.

R. Bagg, "Love, Ceremony and Daydream in Sappho's Lyrics," *Arion* 3.3 (1964) 44–82; G. Bonelli, "Saffo, 2 Diehl = 31 Lobel-Page," *AC* 46 (1977) 453–94; C. M. Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Oxford 19612) 185–88; G. Devereux, "The Nature of Sappho's Seizure in Fr. 31 LP as Evidence of Her Inversion," *CQ* 20 (1970) 17–31; K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (London 1978) 177–79; H. Fränkel, "Eine Stileigenheit der frühgriechischen Literatur," *NGG* (1924) 63–127 = *Wege und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens* (Munich 19602) 40–96; H. Fränkel, *Dichtung und Philosophie des frühen Griechentums* (Munich 19622) 199–200; C. Gallavotti, "Esegesi e testo dell'Od. fr. 2 Saffo," *RFIC* 70 (1942) 113–24; C. Gallavotti, "Per il testo di Saffo," *RFIC* 94 (1966) 257–67; B. Gentili, "La veneranda Saffo," *QUCC* 2 (1966) 37–62; G. Jachmann, "Sappho und Catull," *RhM* 107 (1964) 1–33; G. M. Kirkwood, *Early Greek Monody* (Ithaca and London 1974) 120–22; G. L. Koniaris, "On Sappho, fr. 31 (L.-P.)," *Philologus* 112 (1968) 173–86; M. R. Lefkowitz, "Critical Stereotypes and the Poetry of Sappho," *GRBS* 14 (1973) 113–23; M. Marcovich, "Sappho Fr. 31: Anxiety Attack or Love Declaration?" *CQ* 22 (1972) 19–32; T. McEvilley, "Sappho Fragment Thirty-One: The Face Behind the Mask," *Phoenix* 32 (1978) 1–18; R. Merkelbach, "Sappho und ihr Kreis," *Philologus* 101 (1957) 1–29; D. L. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (Oxford 1955) 19–33; G. Perrotta, *Saffo e Pindaro* (Bari 1935) 46–49; G. A. Privitera, "Ambiguità antitesi analogia nel fr. 31 L.P. di Saffo," *QUCC* 8 (1969) 37–80; T. Reinach & A. Puech, *Alcée, Sapho* (Paris 1937); H. Saake, *Zur Kunst Sapphos* (Paderborn 1971) 17–38; H. Saake, *Sapphostudien* (Paderborn 1972) 53–55; W. Schade-waldt, *Sappho: Welt und Dichtung: Dasein in der Liebe* (Potsdam 1950) 98–112; A. Setti, "Sul fr. 2 di Saffo," *SIFC* n.s. 16 (1939) 195–221; B. Snell, "Sapphos Gedicht Φαίνεται μοι κῆνος," *Hermes* 66 (1931) 71–90 = *Gesammelte Schriften* (Göttingen 1966) 82–97;

line 5. One's understanding of the poem is in large measure dependent on what one makes of this monosyllable. What is its antecedent? The suggestions are several, but they in fact fall into two groups. The antecedent either directly precedes the relative or is to be found somewhere farther back in the first stanza: once an immediately preceding antecedent is rejected, disagreement commences.

The majority, it would appear, take the *τό* to refer to *γελαίσας ἰμέροεν* (or *ἄδν φωνείσας . . . καὶ γελαίσας ἰμέροεν*). The girl's voice and laughter set Sappho's heart aflutter.² There are objections raised against this. It is inelegant, if not illogical, to say, "I am overwhelmed when I *hear your voice* because when(ever) I *look at you*. . . ." An item from the first scene is selected (and emphasized with *ἡ μάν*), then dropped in the phrase that purports to be explanatory.³ A further criticism of this view is that the man exists in the poem solely for the purpose of awakening the girl's laughter--though prominently placed he has minimal importance and disappears immediately.⁴

A second view which has had considerable currency is that the antecedent is the two finite verbs *ἰσδάνει καὶ . . . ὑπακούει* with their expressed subject *κῆνος . . . ὦνῃρ ὅττις*. The antecedent, in other

M. Treu, *Sappho* (Munich 1954) 24–25, 177–79; O. Tsagarakis, "Some Neglected Aspects of Love in Sappho's fr. 31 LP," *RhM* 122 (1979) 97–118; A. Turyn, *Studia Sapphica*, *Eus* Supp. 6 (1929); U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Sappho und Simonides* (Berlin 1913) 56–59; G. Wills, "Sappho 31 and Catullus 51," *GRBS* 8 (1967) 167–97. Also influential but not directly relevant to the present discussion is M. L. West, "Burning Sappho," *Maia* 22 (1970) 307–30.

²The translations of Fränkel (*Dichtung* 199) and Reinach-Puech (p. 194) make it clear that this is how they understand the pronoun. Snell (p. 78), Kirkwood (p. 255, n. 36), Marcovich (pp. 24–25), McEvilley (pp. 10–11), state that it is to be so understood.

³Wills 169. Marcovich attempts to ease the difficulty by saying that the meaning of *ὡς γὰρ <ἔς> σ' ἴδω* is "whenever I look you *in the face*" and that the girl's voice and laughter are aspects of the girl's face. The explanation is somewhat circuitous, and the difficulty does not vanish: the laughter is still heard, not seen. And further, as Schade-waldt had observed (p. 99): "Das Mädchen wird nicht ins Gesicht gepriesen, auch ihre Stimme wie ihr Lachen erscheinen nur schnell im Vorübergehen."

⁴Wills 168; McEvilley 11. This disappearance does not trouble those who believe the poem to be a wedding-song, for in this case the man's presence is quite simply demanded by the occasion, even if the poem scarcely needs him. Most German scholars (e.g., Wilamowitz, Snell, Schade-waldt, Fränkel, Treu, Merkelbach) consider the poem a *Hochzeitslied*. McEvilley's article is essentially an elaboration of the last sentence of the 1966 reprint of Snell's 1931 article: "Obwohl dem besprochenen Gedicht Sapphos der Makarismos des Hochzeitsliedes zugrunde liegt, möchte ich heute doch nicht mehr annehmen, dass es bei der Hochzeit gesungen sein müsste."

words, equals τὸ ἐκεῖνον ἰζάνειν καὶ ὑπακούειν.⁵ This theory forces us to assume that Sappho is expressing her jealousy of the man. The great difficulty with the jealousy theory, and the reason for disliking it as a solution, would seem to be, not that jealousy is unbecoming, but that the following clause, which specifies Sappho's reaction, contains an unequivocal singular pronoun.⁶ "when(ever) I look at *you*. . . ." Page (p. 27) believes that ὡς γὰρ <ἐς> σ' ἴδω means "when I look at you sitting near him as you are," but McEvilley (p. 11) justly observes that this is hardly supported by Sappho's regular practice: what moves Sappho generally is beauty itself, the sight or thought of something she loves rather than its possession by someone else. The same verb ἐπτόαισ' at fr. 22.14 seems to confirm this. A further objection, perhaps, is that the phrase ὡς γὰρ <ἐς> σ' ἴδω means "every time I look at you." To say, "your sitting with him stuns me because whenever I see you with him it stuns me," is a feeble and circular argument.⁷

A number of critics claim that the antecedent is the entire preceding statement, not just the verbs in the subordinate clause. The antecedent is thus construed as τὸ δ' αὐτὸν ἰσόθεον εἶναι φῶτα.⁸ Against this third theory the objections made against the second would appear to be valid. For the man's godlike nature is revealed *inasmuch as* he is sitting there with the object of Sappho's preoccupation, and her reaction (ἐπτόαισεν) is still occasioned by his enjoyment of what she lacks, else she would not be affected. And so jealousy is still operative. Moreover, as the most articulate advocate of this theory realizes, the γὰρ of line 7 is again illogical: Sappho interjects a statement of her jealousy and explains it by pointing to her regular symptoms when she sees the girl alone. The movement of thought becomes, "He's godlike, sitting there; *this* affects me, *because* when(ever) I look at *you* I'm reduced." Since this makes little sense, emendation becomes necessary. Logic is restored by

⁵Perrotta 47, note 1; Page 22.

⁶C. Theander, "Studia Sapphica," *Eranos* 32 (1934) 83, note 2, inclines towards the first solution because "poetrium animi affectu . . . parum honesto liberat." On the other hand, Perrotta states (p. 47, n. 1), "la gelosia di Saffo è amore." Bonelli, defending Perrotta's view, simply claims (p. 493) that the singular pronoun is equivalent to a plural. Italian scholars not infrequently opt for the jealousy theory; e.g., in addition to Ferrari and Barigazzi (see bibl. in Wills 167), Romagnoli (cited by Perrotta *loc. cit.*), and Gentili (p. 49, n. 65), who simply refers to the poem as the "ode della gelosia." Bagg (p. 65) speaks of Sappho's "savage jealousy" and "bitterness" without explaining exactly how he construes the text.

⁷Wills 170.

⁸Gallavotti, *RFIC* 70, 117; Wills 183; Saake, *Zur Kunst* 26–27.

changing $\mu' \eta \mu\acute{\alpha}\nu$ to $\delta\eta \kappa\epsilon\nu$. The sequence is now a sensible, "Sitting there would have a devastating effect on me, for I'm regularly susceptible."⁹

But the result of the emendation is to create yet another candidate: the antecedent of the counterfactual verb $\epsilon\pi\tau\acute{o}\alpha\iota\sigma\epsilon\nu$ is in effect now $\tau\acute{o} \epsilon\mu\epsilon \iota\zeta\acute{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\iota\nu \kappa\alpha\iota \upsilon\pi\alpha\kappa\acute{o}\upsilon\epsilon\iota\nu$. This is exactly what Setti, in his influential article,¹⁰ chose. With the sudden change of subject of the two verbs $\iota\zeta\acute{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\iota\nu \kappa\alpha\iota \upsilon\pi\alpha\kappa\acute{o}\upsilon\epsilon\iota\nu$ it becomes necessary to create (Wills) or understand (Setti, Welcker) a counterfactual statement.

A view recently put forward is that the $\tau\acute{o}$ refers to the entire preceding scene but that the "woman speaker . . . identifies herself with the charming girl sitting close to the godlike man and suffers an emotional breakdown . . . because she does not enjoy what the other does: the company of a man. . . ."¹¹ This theory, as its author shows, finds indirect support from Greek folksong, but it makes Sappho's choice of words extremely puzzling. There is no real point in mentioning the girl's charms if they have no effect on the singer: the sweet voice and lovely laughter become otiose details. And the girl, not the man, might more reasonably be described as godlike if she enjoys what the singer most ardently longs for. The objection advanced against Page carries force in this case too: the expressed pronoun object is singular.¹²

⁹Wills 183–86. By his emendation he is attempting to create in the Greek the "würde" of Welcker's "mir würde es gewiss . . . das Herz erschüttern." Emendation is in any case required, Wills claims, because $\tau\acute{o} \mu' \eta \mu\acute{\alpha}\nu$ is impossible Greek: the particles $\eta \mu\acute{\alpha}\nu$ always introduce the asseverative statement to which they are connected and thus cannot follow $\tau\acute{o} \mu\omicron\iota$. Marcovich (p. 25, n. 1b) meets this objection, pointing to Alcaeus 344.1, $\omicron\delta' \eta \mu\acute{\alpha}\nu$.

¹⁰His explanation (p. 214) illustrates his choice: "Saffo pensa per un momento possibile per sè quello che è reale per l'uomo . . . e ne rimane sbigottita e tremante." Lefkowitz (p. 120) translates: "This (i.e. hearing you) terrifies my heart." The antecedent appears to be taken as the act of hearing, to be $\tau\acute{o} \epsilon\mu\epsilon \upsilon\pi\alpha\kappa\acute{o}\upsilon\epsilon\iota\nu$ to the exclusion of $\tau\acute{o} \epsilon\mu\epsilon \iota\zeta\acute{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\iota\nu$. This is the equivalent of taking the antecedent as the girl's voice, and the interpretation probably belongs with those in note 2 above.

¹¹Tsagarakis 117.

¹²Tsagarakis and Page might better adopt the reading $\omega\varsigma \gamma\alpha\rho \epsilon\iota\sigma\acute{\iota}\delta\omega$ defended by A. J. Beattie, "Sappho Fr. 31," *Mnemosyne* 4.9 (1956) 111, and G. M. Bolling, "Textual Notes on the Lesbian Poets," *AJP* 82 (1961) 163. This would at least have the advantage of eliminating the pronoun which specifies the girl as the object of Sappho's attention and would allow us to believe more easily that the presence of the man in the *tête-a-tête* is what excites Sappho. The unexpressed object of $\epsilon\iota\sigma\omicron\rho\hat{\alpha}\nu$ could in this case, as Beattie suggests, be $\sigma\phi\acute{\omega}$.

Each theory presents real difficulties. One critic simply suggests that the attempt to find a clear antecedent is a misguided one: "l'immagine prevale sulla funzione sintattica" and the ambiguity is intended.¹³ One must, it seems, either accept this judgement, or, if convinced that there is a definite antecedent, approach the problem differently.

There has been as much agreement about the γάρ of line 7 as there has been disagreement regarding the τό of line 5. The rival theories all take one thing for granted: that the γάρ introduces an explanation of the immediately preceding clause and nothing else. This is the source of the trouble in every case, the ground on which any objection is based. The word is frequently omitted in translation,¹⁴ or, if it is analysed, considered directly resumptive of τό . . . ἐπτόαισεν.¹⁵ A different approach may solve the difficulty.

Wilamowitz (p. 57) made the claim that there is a correspondence in the poem between φαίνεται μοι κῆνος ἴσος θεοῖσιν ἔμμεν' ὦνῃρ and τεθνᾶκην φαίνομαι. This observation is illustrated by his translation (the same for both appearances of the verb φαίνεσθαι). The point has never been seriously challenged. Many commentators have indicated their agreement,¹⁶ only an occasional voice being raised against it.¹⁷ The publication of the Florentine papyrus, which has restored the adonic of the fourth stanza, has strengthened Wilamowitz' point. For the repetition of the first-person pronoun (μοι . . . ἔμ' αὐτ[αι]) increases the likelihood that the meaning of φαίνεσθαι is the same in both occurrences. Perhaps the γάρ connects the two principal verbs of the poem, both forms of φαίνεσθαι.

Sappho states that the man who is sitting there and listening to the girl's laughter—laughter which sets her heart aflutter—seems equal to the gods. Why? Because (γάρ) whenever Sappho sees the girl she

¹³Privitera 54, who gives an idiosyncratic list of five possible antecedents.

¹⁴Wilamowitz 56; Perrotta 48; Treu 25; Fränkel, *Dichtung* 199; Kirkwood 121. So too J. M. Edmonds, *Lyra Graeca* 1 (London and New York 1922) 187.

¹⁵Snell 81, note 2, who recognizes the problem and translates "ja auch," stating that the γάρ is "explizierend" rather than "begründend"; Setti 214, note 1; Wills 168–69; Marcovich 23 (no. 6); Saake, *Zur Kunst* 28, on the ground that "jeder Gedanke unlöslich mit dem voranstehenden verknüpft (ist)"—though two pages earlier he had argued that τό did *not* go with its immediate antecedent.

¹⁶E.g., Bowra 188; Gallavotti, *RFIC* 84, 258; Marcovich 23 (no. 7a); Kirkwood 122; Saake, *Zur Kunst* 21; Privitera 68.

¹⁷Jachmann (p. 8) finds it artificial, without saying more; Setti (p. 216, n. 2) finds the verb φαίνεσθαι so insignificant that a precise verbal echo is impossible. But the echo that Wilamowitz found was not limited to the verb φαίνεσθαι alone—and even Setti admits that "c'è un'opposizione intima tra la 'morte' di Saffo e l'immortalità dell'uomo."

reacts so strongly that she all but dies. There has been much debate of late whether ἵσος θεοῖσιν refers to fortitude or beatitude. Critics now regularly feel that it must refer to one to the exclusion of the other.¹⁸ Would Sappho's audience, hearing the words, have restricted their sense? Sappho does not name her emotion¹⁹—herein lies much of the fascination of the poem—but the symptoms show her distress and vulnerability.²⁰

Sappho describes her own reaction in considerable detail. It is easy enough to assume that this reaction is peculiar to her, that it is one which the man does not share. The poem tells us nothing about the man's reaction—we only know that Sappho considers him ἵσος θεοῖσιν. In all likelihood he is both happy *and* composed.²¹ At the end of a crescendo which begins with the individual senses and mounts to encompass the entire body Sappho says that she seems to be on the point of death. Gods enjoy felicity and strength that mortals do not. More especially, they do not die. That is the one certain thing that sets them apart from mortals, the one thing about which there can be no disagreement. At no time is the gulf between gods and men so apparent as at the moment of death: φησὶν ἡ Σαπφὼ ὅτι τὸ ἀποθνήσκειν κακόν· οἱ θεοὶ γὰρ οὕτω κεκρίκασι· ἀπέθνησκον γὰρ ἄν· (fr. 201). For Sappho one exposed, as she frequently is, but enjoying the experience—not suffering and expiring—must be more than human. He belongs, for the moment, with the immortals. The reason? Because Sappho, seeing beauty, senses her mortality acutely.²²

¹⁸E.g., Jachmann 8, Setti 211, Page 21, who maintain that it cannot mean "strong as the gods" whereas Wills 181 and Marcovich 21 say it can mean nothing else. The theory that ἵσος θεοῖσιν refers to "Götterkraft" was first put forward by F. G. Welcker, *Sappho von einem herrschenden Vorurtheil befreit* = *Kleine Schriften* 2 (Bonn 1845) 99, note 45. It is worth noting that Welcker was not so exclusive as are his *Nachfolger*; he says, "Der Mann, der dir nahe sitzen . . . kann, scheint mir wie ein Gott—nicht bloss glücklich . . . sondern auch eine stärkere Natur. . . ."

¹⁹Her critics do. It has been called jealousy (e.g., Page), love (Marcovich), anxiety (Devereux), terror (Schadewaldt), fear (Turyn), wonder (Saake).

²⁰A death wish is expressed at a moment of unhappiness in fr. 94.1, the speaker being either Sappho or a departing girl. There seems to be a similar sentiment in fr. 95.11 and perhaps in fr. 23, where μερίμναν (line 8, cf. fr. 1.26) seems to be associated with δροσόει]τας ὄχθοις (line 11, of Acheron as at fr. 95.12?). Gentili (p. 57) thinks that we are dealing here with a *topos* of the religious language of Sappho's *thiasos*.

²¹So (like Welcker) Schadewaldt: "Dort jene gelassene Götterkraft, die, ohne Schaden zu nehmen, auch das Glück erträgt—hier jene Ausgesetztheit, für die die Nähe der Schönheit lebensgefährlich ist."

²²Sappho's words ἵσος θεοῖσιν thus acquire their full meaning from their context. They are not simply a tag from Homer. In Homer the word ἰσότης, like δῖος, θεῖος,

Lines 1–16 of the poem, then, consist of two long sentences, closely connected. The first contains two subordinate clauses, each attached to its immediate antecedent: ὤνηρ, ὅττις and ἡμέροεν, τό. The objections to taking τό with what immediately precedes it, as most commentators and translators would do, vanish when ὡς γάρ <ἔς> σ' ἴδω is relieved of the burden of explaining only the relative clause. The second sentence is periodic too, beginning with ὡς γάρ and ending with φαίνομ' ἔμ' αὐτ[αι]. Within it there is an ἀλλά (line 9) joining the negative and positive statements of the same symptom (cf. μή . . . δάμνα . . . ἀλλά . . . ἔλθ', fr. 1.4–6), a list beginning with the first symptom (μέν), seven subsequent δέ-clauses rising to a final verb that echoes the principal verb of the first period. A triumph of careful, balanced, logical construction. γάρ is operative throughout the second period (lines 9–16), finally and fully resolved only in line 16. Similarly, the first and principal statement is held through lines 1–6, to be explained by the following sentence. If it be thought that Sappho, as an archaic poet, is incapable of such calculated effect (two carefully juxtaposed statements), Ibycus should be kept in mind (esp. *PMG* 266 and 267).²³ Voigt's edition, with end of sentence (and end of page!) at ἐπτόαισεν brings out the division in the poem more clearly than does the edition of Lobel and Page (commas before and after τό . . . ἐπτόαισεν).²⁴

ἀντίθεος, ἡμίθεος, is not merely a designation of physical strength. It is a regular attribute of the inhabitants of the Heroic Age. To-day's men have no connection with them, except perhaps for a Xerxes (Aesch. *Pers.* 79–80) who is χρυσογόνου γενεᾶς ἰσόθεος φῶς because he is descended from Perseus and has divine blood in his veins. In a battle epic ἰσόθεος φῶς is, of course, naturally used of warriors and thus describes the strong.

²³McEvilley, "Sappho, Fragment Ninety-Four," *Phoenix* 25 (1971) 1–11, has shown the extraordinary skill with which Sappho can construct a poem. Fränkel ("Eine Stileigenheit," pp. 70–75) thinks of Sappho's poetry as typical of the archaic "reihende Stil" in which each element grows from the last and lives in an absolute present which allows no perspective. But this style, in which no overall architectonic controls the relation of the parts to the whole, is no longer practised by Ibycus, whom Fränkel (*Dichtung* 325) has to describe as "nicht mehr archaisch," the archaic style being, on his definition, incapable of holding things in suspension.

²⁴Two commentators understand the γάρ of line 7 as argued for here. Koniaris' understanding is marred by his interpretation of the poem, intent as he is on excluding any idea of strength and allowing only bliss to ἕσος θέοισιν. He paraphrases (p. 185): "This man appears to me to be in seventh heaven . . . since I with one brief look upon you am maddened." This upsets the balance, destroys the contrast. Dover is also of the opinion (p. 178, n. 21) that "'for whenever . . . ' explains why 'He seems to me . . . '." He interprets the emotions felt by Sappho as the envy and despair felt by a mortal towards a god. But this appears to make the man, not the girl, the source of Sappho's reaction and to be open to at least one objection advanced against the jealousy theory: Sappho responds to beauty itself, as a rule, not to its possession by some other person.