

Sappho's Aesthetics

by

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ἀεροβατῶ καὶ περιφρονῶ τὸν ἥλιον.

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Abstract

The lyric poet Sappho wrote her poems in the service of Aphrodite, favouring themes of love and beauty. While scholars have frequently discussed the priority of desire (*eros*) within her poetry, analysis of beauty *qua* beauty has remained but a footnote. This thesis studies Sappho's use of the word 'beautiful' (*kalos*) which holds together in meaning both physical attractiveness and ethical virtue. Her use of natural imagery, as an adjacent aesthetic language, creates a paradisiacal space for contemplation. Objects of adornment are instrumental to remembering youth and love. Moments of beauty become a space for reflection and song.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Sappho's poetry resounds with the language and imagery of beauty. Whether in her sumptuous descriptions of dreamlike groves, of women in their gowns and perfumes, or in the very questioning of what is the most beautiful thing on the dark earth, for Sappho, the allure of beauty is a priority. However, the role of beauty and its steadfast connection to desire is a more difficult question. Why this devotion to unremitting beauty? What can we say about beauty except that it is beautiful? It is easy, and likely still appropriate, to assume that the ceaseless deployment of beautiful images, such as those of roses and jewelry, is simply the archaic aesthetic in full expression. However, Sappho is the first extant poet to use the substantive τὸ κάλον as an abstract concept. The ramifications of this abstract sense of beauty in the context of her abundantly sensorial lyrics have not been fully explored. I argue that these images also hold symbolic meaning, expressing moral and political values. Recent scholarship tends to focus on Sappho as an internal-facing poet concerned with personal emotion.¹ I will examine how Sappho can also be considered as a poet very much invested in the importance of external world who delights in the aesthetic and sensorial pleasures of the environment and people around her. An examination of the language surrounding κάλος, including her images of adornment and beautification, the vocabulary of colour, light, flowers, and pleasant natural phenomena,

¹ Studies that have treated Sappho's interest in ἔρος include: Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet: An Essay* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), Giulia Lanata, "Sappho's Amatory Language," in *Reading Sappho: Contemporary Approaches*, ed. E. Greene (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), Ellen Greene, "Apostrophe and Women's Erotics in the Poetry of Sappho," *Transactions of the American Philological Society (1974-2014)* 124 (1994), et. al.

will show the prevalence of Sappho's interest in beauty. For Sappho, beauty exists all around her, and in the tranquil spaces of her memory.

(i) Lyric poetry: problems and contexts

Early scholarship on Sappho had an unfortunate tendency to take her poetry as biographical reality and construct historical narratives about her life. One prevailing narrative focused on Sappho as 'schoolmistress', a principal of a girls' finishing school. The work of later scholars such as Holt Parker 1993, amongst other scholars, have helpfully critiqued this notion. In truth, not much is known of Sappho's life, despite her status as "the first female voice heard in the West"² other than her existence on the island of Lesbos in Mytilene sometime in the late seventh and early sixth century. Recent scholarship has taken great interest in the context of Sappho's lyric performances. Scholars do not agree whether these songs were sung in a chorus of multiple young girls, or by one person as monody. It is also not agreed whether the songs were performed privately in sympotic contexts, or publicly for potentially ritual ceremonies marking a woman's transition into adulthood. It is likely that Sappho's songs are a mix of the above, some poems were monody, and others were performed in a chorus. This context is crucial to understanding archaic poetry, as Gregory Nagy writes, "the occasion *is* the genre."³ Claude Calame's text asserts the likelihood of choral performance. He posits that if Sappho was educating the girls in her circle "through the performance of song and cult acts [...] this education had an initiatory form and content: it was entirely ritualized."⁴

² Holt Parker "Sappho Schoolmistress," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 123 (1993): 312.

³ Gregory Nagy, "Genre and Occasion," *Mètis: Anthropologie des mondes grecs anciens* 9.1 (1994): 13.

⁴ Claude Calame, *Choruses of Young Women in Ancient Greece: Their Morphology, Religious Role, and Social Functions*, translated by Derek Collins and Janice Orion (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997): 231-2.

Some contemporary scholarship refutes the idea of Sappho's poetry as ritual or cultic, arguing that the "*performative context* of the song maybe be different from the *descriptive context* of the song."⁵ In other words, just as earlier scholars took Sappho's poetic first-person expressions (the lyric "I") as historical fact, there is a similar possibility that readers take too literally the images and situations of the potentially or probably fictional poetic text.⁶ This view is not accepted by all scholars; for example, Anton Bierl suggests that "Such postmodern skepticism against unidirectional constructs of grand narratives and fictionalizations would exclude any possibility of understanding the primary context and intention."⁷ Sappho's poetry may offer hints of the historical and literary context of performance, but there is little evidence for further analysis.

(ii) Ideas of beauty

Critics who focus on ancient Greek ideas of beauty define the term by the emotional response it evokes: "The important point is that beauty is affective. To call something 'beautiful' is to make a claim not just about how something appears but about how it makes you feel."⁸ However, this leaves a great deal of room for variation. If defining 'beauty' in English is at best a perplexing dilemma, then translating κάλος is a veritable quagmire. The word can apply "both to girls and to the burial of one's parents"⁹ Aryeh Kosman writes, "Commonly we describe this fact by saying that *kalon* means both 'good'

⁵ Dimitrios Yatromanolakis, "Ritual Poetics in Archaic Lesbos: Contextualizing Genre in Sappho," in *Greek Ritual Poetics*, eds. Dimitrios Yatromanolakis and Panagiotis Roilos (Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies Trustees for Harvard University): 65

⁶ Dimitrios Yatromanolakis, *Sappho in the Making: The Early Reception* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008): 33, and in Yatromanolakis, "Ritual Poetics," 57-59 and 62-66.

⁷ Anton Bierl, "Visualizing the Cologne Sappho: Mental Imagery through Choralily, the Sun, and Orpheus," in *The Look of Lyric: Greek Song and the Visual* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 310n14.

⁸ Hugo Shakeshaft, "The Terminology for Beauty in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*," *The Classical Quarterly* 69.1 (2019): 2.

⁹ Aryeh Kosman, "Beauty and the Good: Situating the *Kalon*," *Classical Philology* 105, no. 4 (2010): 346.

and ‘beautiful’”¹⁰ He poses the questions: “How so? How are these predicates connected in the concept of the *kalon*?”¹¹ David Konstan, on the other hand, studies the nature of κάλλος in Greek poetry and linguistically distinguishes between the physically attractive sense of the noun κάλλος and the merely ‘fine’ connotation of its cognate adjective κάλος.¹²

In Chapter Two of this thesis, I will study Sappho’s aesthetic language as a system of related images and themes including floral motifs, descriptions of women’s adornment, and the explicit discussion of the κάλλιστον. As a part of this system of beauty, she depicts adornment and style positively, even as necessary for divine favour. Thus, the poet sees adornment as a function of beauty that augments one’s ethical behavior.

Further, within this system, Sappho collapses the natural and human realms in order to connect more fully with the divine. The ethical implications of the word κάλος are an essential component to Sappho’s concept of beauty. I will examine Sappho 16 as the most distinct example of the poet grappling with the meaning of κάλος, in the form of questioning what is ‘the most beautiful thing’. This answer creates a reciprocal relationship between desire and beauty, in which having one begets the other and vice versa.

In Chapter Three I will explore Sappho’s use of natural imagery. Previous studies of archaic Greek landscape found lyric poetry to be lacking in nuanced metaphorical

¹⁰ Kosman, “Beauty and the Good, 346.

¹¹ Kosman, “Beauty and the Good, 352.

¹² David Konstan, *Beauty: The Fortunes of an Ancient Greek Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

meaning; the poets view the landscape as an extension of humanity.¹³ Sappho, however, seems to consider nature as a place of liminal experience where the divine can interact with mortals and vice versa; further, Sappho's fragment 2 includes landscape as more than a short metaphor. Fragment 2 will be significant to this discussion as it has already intrigued scholars for its unusual mix of erotic and desexualized pastoral themes.¹⁴ This analysis will show a relationship between desire, nature, and beauty.

In Chapter Four, I will look into the connections between beauty and memory. Sappho frequently voices that physical beauty fades with time and age, and she anticipates this in a fast-forwarded nostalgia or regret for something that is yet to come. Sappho 58 will be a key text to study as it discusses the implications of aging and loss. For Sappho, youth and beauty are symbolic of fleeting time that can only be preserved by the careful recollection of the beautiful moments.

¹³ These studies include Adam Parry, "Landscape in Greek Poetry," *Yale Classical Studies*, vol. 15 (New Haven: Yale University Press: 1957) and Annette Lucia Giesecke, *The Epic City: Urbanism, Utopia, and the Garden in Ancient Greece and Rome*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, Trustees for Harvard University, 2007).

¹⁴ The following scholars have written on this mix: Anne Pippin Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), Kai Heikkilä, "Sappho Fragment 2 L.-P.: Some Homeric Readings," *Arctos: Acta Philologica Fennica*, vol. 26 (1992).

Chapter 2. Beauty

(i) Situating κάλος in Sappho

Sappho uses variations of the adjective κάλος twenty-six times in twenty-four of her extant fragments. She uses the word to refer to the natural world and celestial objects, to people and gods, to fashion, to singing, to remembered moments of the past, and as an ethical qualification. The LSJ renders κάλος as “beautiful, of outward form” or “fair”, and includes the moral sense of “noble.”¹⁵ The wide range of meaning has caused some anxiety to translators who worry that the sense of ‘physical beauty’ had been digested into a word less charged with outward appearance, and more akin to the English sense of ‘fine’ or ‘good’.¹⁶ As Shakeshaft writes, “beauty is a protean beast, notoriously slippery in the hands of those who try to define it.”¹⁷ Still, the word is cannot be stripped of its reference to a pleasing visual sight and Sappho’s use of the term frequently, if not primarily, refers to physical beauty.¹⁸ There is an important ethical aspect to Sappho’s κάλος. It is in her poetry where we find the first extant use of the substantive τὸ κάλον as

¹⁵ *LSJ*, s.v. καλός.

¹⁶ For instance, Diane Rayor translates fr. 16.3 as “the finest thing on the dark earth” in Diane Rayor and André Lardinois, *Sappho: A New Translation of the Complete Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 33. M. L. West also translates fr. 16.3 as “the finest sight in all the world” in *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 37. David Campbell offers “the most beautiful thing on the black earth,” in Sappho, Alcaeus, *Greek Lyric, Volume I: Sappho and Alcaeus*, ed. and transl. by D. Campbell, Loeb Classical Library 142 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 67, which is also Anne Carson’s version in Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002): 27.

¹⁷ Shakeshaft, “The Terminology for Beauty,” 1.

¹⁸ Konstan finds in the noun κάλλος firmer semantic meaning designating something close to the idea of physical (usually sexual) beauty. See Konstan, *Beauty*, 60. In the extant fragments, Sappho rarely uses this form. Konstan recognizes that “the bare or positive form of the adjective can signify ‘beautiful’ [...] because the basic sense of *fine* or *excellence*, when applied to physical appearance, naturally suggests the idea of beauty.” Konstan, *Beauty*, 39. However, Jon Mikalson disagrees, suggesting instead that the meaning of the adjective κάλος is not primarily *fine* or *excellent*, but rather “its basic sense is of visual beauty, and that this was, in the broader and unique Greek esthetic, expanded over time to moral and other abstract areas.” Mikalson, *New Aspects of Religion in Ancient Athens: Honors, Authorities, Esthetics, and Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2016): 254n23. I favour Mikalson’s sense.

an abstract concept. Nicholas Riegel suggests that “The significance of the substantive here is that for the first time of which we are aware the adjective *καλός* could be thought of on its own, in abstraction from the noun it would modify.”¹⁹ Sappho plays with both image and concept of beauty. Her connection of goodness and beauty, in fragment 50, shows an interest in the ethical implications of *καλός*. These implications hint at the idea that the physical grace and attractiveness of bodies and the natural world are ethically good and divinely approved.

Studying Sappho’s uses of *καλός* contributes to a more nuanced understanding of her meaning. Sappho explicitly ponders the definition of the most beautiful thing in fragment 16; in fragment 50 she equates the beautiful man with the good man, positioning herself near the beginning of a complex tradition of identifying beauty with ethical goodness. In fragment 16, she searches for the meaning of the *κάλλιστον*, the most beautiful thing, and finds her answer: “whatever one loves.” Sappho signals a connection between desire and beauty; however, scholarship has tended to focus only on the significance of desire in her poetry. This overlooks the moments in Sappho’s poetry that are filled with shocking loveliness, attractive turns of phrase which stimulate the senses (especially sight). Sappho dapples her poems with vivid descriptions, beckoning the reader to imagine a scene of intense visual beauty, whether it be human or divine, earthly or celestial. Examining the use of the word *κάλος* in Sappho’s poetry reveals that there is also a subset of words related in meaning and function, such as *ἄβρος* (luxurious, delicate) and *ἄπαλος* (soft, tender), which refer to a similar visual and sensorial attractiveness. These further

¹⁹ Nicholas Riegel, “Beauty, TO KALON, and its Relation to the Good in the Works of Plato,” PhD. diss., University of Toronto, Toronto, 2011.

descriptors emphasize the significance of luxury in Sappho's. The images of sweetapples, dresses and necklaces, light and shadow, floral wreaths, and the array of technicolour flowers come together to contribute to a language symbolizing Sappho's idea of beauty. This language of beauty, whether semantic or symbolic, contributes to the creation of Sappho's 'aesthetics', her poetics of physical and ethical beauty.²⁰ Her understanding of beauty holds together both senses.

Sappho uses κάλος most frequently to refer to humans as youthful and desirable. The figure is usually female, but in some cases the person's gender is uncertain. In fragment 22, "yearning flutters about you, beautiful one," (πόθος τ.[/ ἀμφιπόταται / τὰν κάλαν) the accusative κάλαν modifies either the fragmented τε or it modifies a noun which has been lost. Sappho clearly references a connection between desire and beauty. For example, in fragment 132.1-2, she sings: "I have a beautiful daughter, resembling golden flowers / in form, beloved Kleis" (ἔστι μοι κάλα πάις χρυσίοισιν ἀνθέμοισιν / ἐμφέρην ἔχοισα μόρφαν Κλείς ἀγαπάτα).²¹ Kleis is κάλα and ἀγαπάτα, beautiful and beloved. The floral motif is also very important to Sappho's aesthetic language, suggesting youth and natural beauty. The simple vocative of fragment 108 "beautiful, graceful girl," (ὦ κάλα, ὦ χαρίεσσα) equates this physical attractiveness with the gracefulness and charm of χαρίεσσα. Sappho emphasizes beauty and good-natured charm and carefully attends to the beauty of women. Further usage of κάλος includes a description of women or girls in fragment 41, as the poet sings "for you beautiful women, my mind does not vary" (ταῖς κάλαισ' ὕμιν <τὸ> νόημα τῶμον / οὐ διάμειπτον). One wonders what her

²⁰ My use of the word 'aesthetics' is rather all-purpose, if anachronistic, to describe this particular mood of the poetry which is at study.

²¹ I use Campbell as my primary text; all translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

unchangeable opinion of these women could have been. There is another use of κάλος in fragment 133 where Sappho refers to the κάλαν ἀμοιβάν of Andromeda. Campbell renders, “Andromeda has a fine recompense...”²² The meaning of this fragment is unclear, as is the sense of ἀμοιβάν – is this exchange or return similar to Kleis in fragment 132, whom the singer refuses to give in marriage, as Andromache is in fragment 44? Andromeda is attested as a rival leader of a girls’ circle on Lesbos, which might offer the translation as ‘fine response’, and be used in a sarcastic, iambic sense. Perhaps it refers to the idea of beautiful exchange and the wealth of ἀβροσύνα, which will be discussed in the following section. This use of κάλος is one of the few instances where it is difficult to imagine ‘beautiful’ being the straightforward translation or meaning of the word.

Further uses of κάλος and its variations emphasize physical beauty. Sappho writes δευτέρων ἄβραι Χάριτες καλλίκομοί τε Μοῖσαι “now again! lavish Graces and beautiful-haired Muses”. This epithet for the Muses is also attributed to Helen by Homer in the *Odyssey* (Ἑλένης ... καλλικόμοιο XV.58). Irena Kazik-Zawakzka writes:

Nam hoc adiectivum, Homero quidem notum ... exemplum Hesiodo receptum a Sapphone videtur, Hesiodus enim de Musarum matre ita dixit Μνημοσύνης ... καλλικόμοιο Theog. 915. Locutio Μοῖσαν καλλικόμων etiam apud Simonidem invenitur.

For this adjective, which was recognized in Homer ... an example received, it seems, received by Sappho in Hesiod, for Hesiod said thus of the mother of the Muses: beautiful-haired Mnemosyne Theogony 915. The phrase “of the beautiful-haired Muses” is also found in Simonides.²³

²² Sappho, Alcaeus, *Greek Lyric, Volume I*, ed. Campbell, 151.

²³ Irena Kazik-Zawakzka, *De Sapphicae Alcaicaeque Elocutionis Colore Epico* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy Im. Ossolinskich, 1958): 80.

That the adjective describes the goddess' hair indicates a sense of physical, visual beauty. One might also infer, in that the word describes a goddess, that this word means something more than merely 'fine'. Descriptions of hair are another stylistic ornamentation that the poet will use in her vocabulary of beauty. The word ἄβραι describing the Graces is also a favoured aesthetic word of Sappho's, though double-pronged in meaning: it has the sense of delicate and soft, while also referring to luxurious opulence. The final stanza of fragment 62, while fragmentary, nevertheless combines two aspects of Sappho's aesthetic language: "You came: beautiful / and the garments" (ἔφθατε· κάλαν[/ τά τ' ἔμματα κα]). This fragment is an instance of Sappho's interest in emphasizing fashion, which is a major facet of this system of beauty. In all of these uses, κάλος is easily understood to refer to the individual's physical beauty, and often to indicate their sexual desirability.

Κάλος is also used to refer to objects of fashion and ornamentation. For instance, fragment 39 is clearly concerned with objects of attire.

... πόδας δὲ
 ποίκιλος μάσλης ἐκάλυπτε, Λύδι-
 ον κάλον ἔργον.

And the feet,
 intricate leather straps covered,
 beautiful Lydian work.

Sappho uses the adjective ποίκιλος (as seen in fragment 1 to depict the brilliant radiance of Aphrodite, whether her throne, mind, or dress) and refers to the Eastern centre of luxury: Lydia. The adjective has varied meanings, referring to the variegation of colour, pattern, a shimmering hue, and reflecting light, and frequently refers to such crafts as weaving, painting, and metallurgy. The adjective might even be indicative of the archaic

aesthetic and its tendency to privilege a “*harmonia* that does not unify” but holds together variety and difference.²⁴ The use of ἔργον can have a sense quite similar to the English ‘artwork’ or handcrafted object. Κάλος here is used to refer to an element of clothing, thus tying ‘beauty’ to the styles of fashion. In the same way as ποίκιλος, it too holds together more than one meaning, both extolling the beauty of the sandal, and its Eastern origin.

Animals and elements of the natural world are also indicative of Sapphic κάλος. In fragment 1, Sappho describes the sparrows (στροῦθοι) bearing Aphrodite’s chariot as κάλοι. She very rarely writes on animals in her poetry. The poet also illustrates a scene of a meadow: ἐέρσα κάλα (fr. 96) “beautiful dew” trickles onto a field of multicoloured plants and flowers. Fragment 96 spectacularly exhibits her aesthetic language:

]Σαρδ . [. .]
 πόλ]λακι τυίδε [ν]ῶν ἔχοισα

ὡσπ . [. . .] . ωόμεν, . [. . .] . . χ[. .]
σε θέαι σ’ ἰκέλαν ἀρι-
γνώται, σᾶι δὲ μάλιστ’ ἔχαιρε μόλπαι.

νῦν δὲ Λῦδαισιν ἐμπρέπεται γυναι-
κεσσιν ὥς ποτ’ ἀελίω
δύντος ἀ βροδοδάκτυλος σελάννα

πάντα περρέχοισ’ ἄστρα· φάος δ’ ἐπί-
σχει θάλασσαν ἐπ’ ἀλμύραν
ἴσως καὶ πολυανθέμοις ἀρούραις·

ἀ δ’ ἐέρσα κάλα κέχυται τεθά-
λαισι δὲ βρόδα κᾶπαλ’ ἄν-
θρυσκα καὶ μελίλωτος ἀνθεμώδης·

πόλλα δὲ ζαφοίταισ’ ἀγάνας ἐπι-

²⁴ Adeline Grand-Clément, “Poikilia,” in *A Companion to Ancient Aesthetics*, edited by P. Destrée and P. Murray (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell): 546.

μνάσθεις Ἄτθιδος ἡμέρω
λέπταν ποι φρένα κ[ᾶ]ρ[ι σαῖ] βόρηται·

κῆθι δ' ἔλθην ἄμμ . [. .] . .ισα τῶδ' οὐ
νῶντ' ἀ[. .]υστονυμ[. . .] πόλυς
γαρύει [. . .]αλογ[.] .ο μέσσον·

ε]ῦμαρ[εσ μ]έν οὐκ ἄμμι θέαισι μόρ-
φαν ἐπή[ρατ]ον ἐξίσω-
σθαι συ[. .]ρος ἔχησθ' ἀ[. . .] .νίδηον

]το[. . . .]ρατι-
μαλ[. . . .] . ερος
καὶ δ[. .]μ[. . . .]ος Ἀφροδίτα

καμ[. . . .] νέκταρ ἔχευ' ἀπὸ
χρυσίας [. . . .]γαν
. . . .]απουρ[. . . .]χέρσι Πείθω

...

[. . . .]εσ τὸ Γεραίστιον
[. . . .]γ φίλαι
[. . . .]υστον οὐδενο[. . . .]

[. . . .]ερον ἰξο[μ]

Sardis ... often here holding her mind ... Just as ... we ... the goddess like ... unmistakable, and most greatly she rejoiced in your song. And now she stands out in Lydian women as, when the sun sets, the rose-fingered moon embraces all the stars and spreads the light upon the briny sea and equally over the flower-filled fields, the dew drips in beauty and the roses and soft dandelion and flowery sweetclover bloom, and wandering far, remembering gentle Atthis with longing, perhaps a delicate heart... is devoured. There we ... go ... this ... understanding ... many ... she sings ... middle. It is not easy for us, in charming appearance, to equal goddesses, you would have ... Eros and Aphrodite and ... nectar from a golden ... her hands Persuasion ... the Geraistium dear one ...

(Fr. 96)

The poem moves through memories of Sardis, an extended simile of the rose-fingered moon, and the invocation of nature begets the remembering of a lost girl. The mass of flowers creates a lush texture to the poem. Waern rejects the translation 'chervil' for

ἄνθρυσκα, offering “umbellate” instead, which are not exactly dandelions, but similar enough in appearance.²⁵ Waern suggests that the use of ἄπαλα “refers to the soft, airy appearance of the numerous white flowers, an airiness that is increased by its masseffect.”²⁶ The texture of softness becomes visually appealing in this fragment. The poem is framed by comparisons to a goddess. Being ‘outstanding’ amongst women (ἐμπρέπεται) also refers to the outward appearance of women. Κάλα refers to the dew, but it seems also to transfer to the litany of flowers that follow. Thus, this fragment runs the gamut of different beauties: song, person, the natural world, desire, and Aphrodite’s presence. Sappho deploys her aesthetic vocabulary to create scenes where the loss of love is felt by all the senses.

Celestial imagery similar to that of fragment 96 is also occasionally modified with the adjective under discussion. Fragment 104B is only four words: ἀστέρων πάντων ὁ κάλλιστος “the most beautiful of all the stars.” Sappho qualifies an unknown subject as having superlative κάλλος among the stars: perhaps metaphorically relating to a woman or describing the evening star Hesperus whom she calls in fragment 104A (Ἔσπερε). Sappho refers to a beauty so powerful it transcends earthly symbols. This is a kind of celestial, otherworldly beauty. It does not make sense to translate this as ‘fine’ or ‘excellent’. That the Greeks found great beauty in light and radiance is well-attested.²⁷ In fragment 34, celestial imagery is used to compare outstanding beauty:

²⁵ Ingrid Waern. “Flora Sapphica,” *Eranos* 24 (1972): 5.

²⁶ Waern. “Flora Sapphica,” 6.

²⁷ Barbara Hughes Fowler, “The Archaic Aesthetic,” in *The American Journal of Philology* 105 (1984), 144-146; Michel Briand, “Light and Vision in Pindar’s *Olympian Odes*: Interplays of Imagination and Performance,” in *The Look of Lyric: Greek Song and the Visual* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 239; Konstan, *Beauty*, 42.

ἄστερες μὲν ἀμφὶ κάλαν σελάνναν
 ἄψ ἀπυκρύπτοισι φάεννον εἶδος
 ὄπποτα πλήθοισα μάλιστα λάμπη
 γᾶν

stars around the beautiful moon
 conceal away their illumined shape
 when the light is at its fullest
 on the earth

In this fragment, those stars which are less beautiful (indeed, even the word εἶδος connotes beauty, which suggests that, due to the comparison, the κάλαν referring to the moon does have the sense of visual beauty and not simply ‘fine’) shy away from their competition. The comparison of the girl in fragment 96 to the moon now takes on this sense of truly supernatural beauty.

The ethical sense of κάλος in Sappho is difficult to delineate. For example, in fragment 3.2-5 (while the text is corrupt), Sappho writes,

. . . . κ]άλων κᾶσλων· σ[. . .
 φί]λοις, λύπης τέ μ[ε. . .
]μ’ ὄνειδος

...beautiful and good, you...
 ...to the beloveds, grief and me
 ...reproach

This poem deals with complex ethical emotions, including blame and friendship, in the context of “the beautiful and the good”. The LSJ uses this fragment as an example of the definition of κάλος “in a moral sense” as “beautiful, noble, or honourable” unless it refers to persons.²⁸ As Blondell writes, “Greek culture does not distinguish easily between moral and physical beauty, and is deeply uncomfortable with the potential dissonance between them.”²⁹ These two concepts were necessarily held together as one. Konstan

²⁸ *LSJ*, s.v. κάλος. The LSJ also uses three other Sapphic fragments as exemplum for κάλος.

²⁹ Ruby Blondell, *Helen of Troy: Beauty, Myth, Devastation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): x.

suggests that in fragment 50, “Sappho seems to play on the two senses of *kálos*, as visually attractive and morally fine [...] surely Sappho is not claiming that good character is always accompanied by good looks – but because virtue has its own appeal.”³⁰

Konstan’s reading plays on the diversity of meanings, wherein the (supplied) second instance of *káλος* refers to the ‘fine’ sense of the word; which is contrasted with *άγαθος*.

I would argue that Sappho does equate, to a large degree, physical attractiveness and virtue, especially as we will later see in her taste regarding proper adornment. Perhaps another translation might be rendered,

ὁ μὲν γὰρ κάλος ὅσσον ἴδην πέλεται <κάλος>,
 ὁ δὲ κάγαθος αὐτίκα καὶ κάλος ἔσσειται.

For the beautiful one just in looks becomes beautiful,
and the good one will straightway also be beautiful

(Fr. 50)

Sappho plays on the words *πέλεται* and *ἔσσειται* in the evolution of being or becoming beautiful. Riegel, discussing fragment 50, says that Sappho is the “first to present an explicit connection between the good and the beautiful”.³¹ She is perhaps suggesting that one develops beautiful looks over time but being good (*κάγαθος*) lends one an air of ‘ethical beauty’. G. W. Most suggests, “We may suspect that Sappho’s language did not allow her to distinguish systematically between the ethical and aesthetic aspects of *κάλος*.”³² He writes that “it is certain that two kinds of *κάλος* are described, one which is purely optical and another which contains an essential ethical component; yet the same word is used for both.”³³ At the same time, it is clear that Sappho *could* in fact distinguish

³⁰ Konstan, “Sappho 16,” 23-24.

³¹ Riegel, “Beauty, TO ΚΑΛΟΝ, and its Relation to the Good,” 63, discussion at 64-65.

³² G. W. Most, “Sappho Fr. 16. 6-7L-P,” *The Classical Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (1981): 16.

³³ Most, “Sappho Fr. 16,” 16n35.

these concepts, at least to some extent. The concepts “the good” and “the beautiful” should be thought of separately, and not synonymized. Konstan equates *esla* (which he refers to as “good things”) with *kála* due to fragment 137.3: ἔσλων ἴμερον ἢ κάλων. He understands that “the two terms here are roughly synonymous”. However, he notes that Carson’s translation offers “a desire for good or beautiful things”.³⁴ Konstan does not translate this line in full, though it seems he is supplying a translation akin to ‘a desire for good things and fine things.’ Riegel’s interpretation is much the same, “The physical attractiveness of appearance fades with time, but one can also be attracted to the more stable quality of a person’s goodness.”³⁵ Sappho notes the desirable similarity between the two concepts, but holds them apart as different ideas. Perhaps she is even explicitly discovering and elucidating the delineation of the concepts held together within κάλος. Jon Mikalson writes, “In the context of sacrifice, that τὰ ἱερά are καλά indicates the approval of the former, and our honorary inscriptions themselves express the approval of the latter.”³⁶ The word κάλος has a quality of endorsement. Perhaps we might flip Riegel’s interpretation: rather than Sappho reminding the listener of the ravages of time, she is suggesting that being good is a lasting path to becoming beautiful, which is also virtuous.

Konstan writes that “the fundamental response that is excited by beauty in ancient Greece was understood to be precisely desire.”³⁷ It is notable that Sappho does not necessarily include her reaction or others’ in the face of beauty, but where she does, the feeling is either admiration or desire. However, while the beauty of girls and women is frequently

³⁴ Konstan, “Sappho 16,” 24.

³⁵ Riegel, “Beauty, TO KALON, and its Relation to the Good,” 65.

³⁶ Jon Mikalson, *New Aspects of Religion in Ancient Athens*, 250.

³⁷ Konstan, *Beauty*, 62.

examined alongside its desirous response, Sappho also takes great care to note the beauty of objects and the natural world. While the objects may also be desired, the natural world remains apart from human possession. Sappho's interest in beauty is thus explicitly connected to visual aesthetics.

(ii) Adjacent aesthetic language

Sappho's poetry teems with words of finery and delicacy which contribute to the loveliness in her lyrics. The words do not necessarily need to mean precisely 'beautiful' in order to indicate beauty. Lanata notes that Sappho's amatory language encompasses a wide vocabulary, that "recur[s] with a significant frequency, equal only to the appearance of terms that connote other characteristic aspects of Sapphic sensuality such as ἄβροος, ἄδυσ, ἄπαλος, γλύκυσ, and, naturally, κάλος."³⁸ These words, meaning luxurious and tender, pleasant, soft, sweet, and beautiful, are found often in her poetry. Along with Sappho's symbolic language of adornment and floral imagery, these words and symbols together make up her poetics of beauty, what I am calling Sappho's aesthetic vocabulary.

Regarding the language of wealth and luxury in the ancient world, the Gormans write,

as is not unusual in the scholarship, the negative sense of the luxury words is taken to be self-evident. [...] these words not only represent different nuanced aspects of wealth and social status, but also that they are not naturally or inherently pejorative and can often be quite positive in their implications."³⁹

Similarly, analyzing the language of beauty in Sappho should not rely on assumptions.

As Burnett writes, "[it is] why she uses a tight set of descriptive words for whatever she would praise, calling flesh, flower, voice, landscape or sensation always 'luxurious',

³⁸ Giuliana Lanata, "Sappho's Amatory Language," translated by William Robins, in *Reading Sappho: Contemporary Approaches*, ed. Ellen Greene (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 20.

³⁹ Robert J. Gorman and Vanessa B. Gorman, *Corrupting Luxury in Ancient Greek Literature* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2014): 27.

‘soft’, ‘sweet’, ‘tender’, or ‘beautiful’.”⁴⁰ On this account, Konstan’s favoured translation of κάλος as “choiceworthy”⁴¹ is sensible. Yet “choice-worthy” or “praise-worthy” does not seem evocative enough of the wonderfully sensorial nature of these adjectives.

Umberto Eco warns that καλόν “ought to put us on our guard: Beauty is all that pleases, arouses admiration, or draws the eye. The beautiful object is an object that by virtue of its form delights the senses, especially sight and hearing.”⁴² While this ‘sense-delighting’ translation of κάλος is more or less accurate, it seems incorrect to take ‘pleasurable’ or ‘delightful’ as appropriate translations of κάλος (and, as Rachel Barney points out, Plato tells us “what attitude is prompted by the *kalon*, and it is *eros*, not admiration.”⁴³) It seems necessary to draw out the sensorial nature of Sappho’s images in order to understand what she means by κάλος.

Poem 92, while quite fragmentary, gives us an excellent array of Sappho’s aesthetic terminology.

πέπλον[...]πυσχ[
 και χλε[..]σαω[
 κροκόεντα[
 πέπλον πορφυ[ρ]δεξω,
 χλαιναι περσ[
 στέφανοι περ[
 καλ[.]οσσαμ[
 φρυ..
 πορφ[...
 τάπα[

dress ... crocus-coloured ... purple dress ... [I showed?] ... cloaks ... garlands ...
 [beautiful?] ... purple ... rugs

⁴⁰ Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, 228.

⁴¹ Konstan, *Beauty*, 33.

⁴² Umberto Eco, *On Beauty*, transl. Alastair McEwen (London: Seeker & Warburg, 2004): 39-41.

⁴³ Rachel Barney, “Notes on Plato on the *Kalon* and the Good,” *Classical Philology* 105, no. 4 (October 2010): 375.

We have colours (κροκόεντα), various terms for dresses (πέπλον and χλαιναι), wreaths (στέφανοι), and two references to the indelible purple (πορφύρα).⁴⁴ It reads like a catalogue of beautification implements, similar to the catalogue of dowry-items Hektor takes with Andromache in fragment 44. More fragmentary evidence shows even further interest in the minutiae of adornment: Pollux's *Vocabulary* gives us the single word βεῦδος of fragment 177, which Pollux says is a κιμβερικόν or a διαφανής χιτώνισκος, that is a diaphanous (probably transparent or 'see-through') dress. In *Sophistic Preparation*, fragment 179, Phrynichus tells us Σαπφῶ δὲ γρύτην καλεῖ τὴν μύρων καὶ γυναικείων τινῶν θήκην (Sappho calls 'γρύτα' a case for perfumes and anything feminine). This word is tantalizingly specific, and its translations are wonderfully evocative: Campbell translates γρύτα as a "vanity-bag"⁴⁵ and Carson offers "makeup bag".⁴⁶ I might offer 'jewelry box'. While the meaning of these fragments is uncertain, these recurring images seem to emphasize the mood and atmosphere the poet creates.

As situated in Lesbos in the archaic age, Sappho is intrinsically connected to her Lesbian and archaic context. Her poetry has a distinct social program upholding a lifestyle of elite luxury and opulence and a parallel religious motivation. Sappho links these two motivations with relationships and expressions of beauty. As a poet, she is distinguished by her gender and her status as an elite woman in archaic Lesbos, and as such, her poetry cannot be isolated from the historical and political environments in which she lived.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ The colour purple has long been a status symbol, "valued and displayed in many societies as a symbol of economic capability, social status, and official rank (both political and sacerdotal)." See Reinhold, *History of Purple as a Status Symbol in Antiquity* (Brussels: Latomus, 1970): 8. For Homeric and historical references from Herodotus and Xenophanes, see Reinhold, *History of Purple*, 16-17.

⁴⁵ Sappho, Alcaeus, *Greek Lyric, Volume I*, ed. Campbell, 177.

⁴⁶ Carson, *If Not, Winter*, 351.

⁴⁷ This is a complex problem within Sappho's poetry: she is connected to her context, but her context comes to us primarily through her own writings (and those of Alcaeus), once again endangering us of

The influence of Eastern values, particularly that of ἀβροσύνη, offers a way to understand Sappho's positive inclination toward feminine adornment.⁴⁸ The religious function of beauty in her poetry functions as a worldly connection to the divine realm above. For Sappho, however, visual beauty is not simply a lesser mode of the Good, but in fact, a human method of attaining divine approval.

A prominent example of Sappho's commitment to and interest in adornment is fragment 44, as Andromache journeys with her rainbowed assortment of accoutrements:

Ἕκτωρ καὶ συνέταιρ[ο]ι ἄγοισ' ἐλικώπιδα
 Θήβας ἐξ ἱέρας Πλακίας τ' ἀπ' ἀ[ι]ν[ν]άω
 ἄβραν Ἀνδρομάχαν ἐνὶ ναῦσιν ἐπ' ἄλμυρον
 πόντον· πόλλα δ' [ἐλί]γματα χρύσια κᾶμματα
 πορφύρα] καταύτ[με]να, ποίκιλ' ἀθύρματα,
 ἀργύρα τ' ἀνάρ[ι]θμα [ποτή]ρ[ια] κἀλέφαις.

Hektor and his comrades led the glancing-eyed girl
 from holy Thebes and flowing Plakia
 delicate Andromache into the ships on the briny
 sea, along with many golden bracelets and gowns
 Purple, perfumed, gowns, brilliant baubles,
 And countless silver cups, and ivory.

(Fr. 44.5-10)

Mireille Lee writes that in Greek art,

Hand-held accessories were important indicators of gender and status. [...] Although men are frequently represented in Greek art holding various external symbols of their power and status, including money bags and walking sticks,

reading biography too closely into her poetry. That said, her poetry does not exist in a void. I follow Leslie Kurke, who explicitly forwards “that Sappho participated in the elitist subculture of luxury and refinement.” See Kurke, “Archaic Greek Poetry,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Archaic Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 159.

⁴⁸ The archaic Greek understanding of Eastern culture was one of luxury and opulence, and it is unfortunate that much of our reception of this culture is through the lens of writers degrading it. As Page duBois writes, “when distinguishing between Attic and Asian styles, [the rhetorical theorists in ancient Rome] deprecate the Asian, associating it with luxury and effeminacy.” See duBois, *Sappho is Burning*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): 168. duBois’ chapter in, “Asianism and the Theft of Enjoyment,” in *Sappho is Burning*, 163-194, is one of the few pieces of scholarship that seriously considers Sappho’s interest in adornment.

women are more likely to hold an article of jewelry or...to grasp a garment in one hand, suggesting their identity stems primarily from their personal adornment.⁴⁹

In a similar fashion, the objects of Andromache's dowry (for the objects and the woman are paralleled as accusative objects) are representative of her identity: her beauty is represented not only through her physical appearance, but through the pieces of personal adornment. Lee cites vase-painting and relief sculpture wherein women are "repeatedly shown...gazing at their own reflections in mirrors." She posits that, "the self-referential nature of such images underscores the value of women's beauty as an end to itself."⁵⁰ Sappho already challenges the idea of beauty for beauty's sake, the woman as simply beauty to behold. Instead, this celebration of a sliver of a time before tragedy is imbued with this delightful and triumphant display of wealth and grandeur. Indeed, while woman and dowry are all accusative objects, they are not at all represented like the κάλον κακόν that is the first woman in Hesiod.⁵¹

Alcman's *Partheneion* is a useful comparison in examining feminine adornment.

ταὶ Πεληάδες γὰρ ἄμιν
 Ὀρθραὶ φᾶρος φεροῖσαις
 νύκτα δι' ἀμβροσίαν ἄτε σήριον
 ἄστρον ἀνηρομένοι μάχονται.
 οὔτε γὰρ τι πορφύρας
 τόσσοι κόροι ὥστ' ἀμύναι,
 οὔτε ποικίλοι δράκων
 παγχρύσιοι, οὐδὲ μίτρα
 Λυδία, νεανίδων
 ἱανογ [λ] εφάρων ἄγαλμα,
 οὐδὲ ταὶ Ναννῶς κόμαι,
 ἀλλ' οὐ[δ'] Ἀρέτα σιειδής,
 οὐδὲ Σύλακίς τε καὶ Κλησισηήρα,
 οὐδ' ἐς Αἰνησιμβρ[ό]τας ἐνθοῖσα φασεῖς·

⁴⁹ Mireille M. Lee, "Dress and Adornment in Archaic and Classical Greece," in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, ed. Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillon (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012): 185.

⁵⁰ Lee, "Dress and Adornment," 186.

⁵¹ Hesiod, *Theogony*, 585.

Ἄσταφίς [τ]έ μοι γένοιτο
καὶ ποτιγλέποι Φίλυλλα
Δαμαρ[έ]τα τ' ἐρατά τε φιανθεμῖς·
ἀλλ' Ἀγησιχόρα με τηρεῖ.
θωστήρ[ιά τ'] ἄμ' ἐπαινεῖ;

The Pleiades fight us as they are rising, as we are carrying the chaplet to Orthria through the ambrosial night like the star Sirius, when the Syrian star is rising.

Neither is there such excess of purple could ward off,
nor is there a well-worked all-gold bracelet,
nor Lydian headband, ornament, thing of beauty
that boasts the glory of violet-eyed young girls
Not even the tresses of Nanno.

But goddess-like Areta,
nor Sulakis, or Kleisera,
nor would you say, going to Ainesimbrotas's,
and may Phillula look upon me
and Damareta and lovely Ianthemis,
but Hagesichora wears me out.

(Alc. 1.60-77)

Segal compares the martial context of Sappho 16 to the 'battle' that is the contest of beauty in the *Partheneion*.⁵² Alcman's adornment imagery is explicitly competitive. Sappho's focuses on how adornment lends beauty to one woman or girl. The line οὔτε γάρ τι πορφύρας / τόσσοι κόροι ὥστ' ἀμύναι (line 64) is intriguing though unclear.⁵³

In the converse of Sappho's approval of fine attire, Sappho satirizes the woman who does not know how to dress herself:

τίς δ' ἀγροίωτις θέλγει νόον
ἀγροίωτιν ἐπεμμένα σπόλαν
οὐκ ἐπισταμένα τὰ βράκε' ἔλκην ἐπὶ τῶν σφύρων;

⁵² Charles Segal, *Aglaia: The Poetry of Alcman, Sappho, Pindar, Bacchylides, and Corinna* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997): 73.

⁵³ Gregory Nagy renders, "all the royal purple / in the world cannot resist," in "Alcman's *Partheneion*," accessible online at <https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/5294>.

What rural gixie girl seduces your mind? ...
 Robed in country dress ...
 Not knowing to tug her skirt to her ankles.

(Fr. 57)

Sappho denigrates the ugly and disordered and mocks the girl who fails to properly present herself as urbane. This social ostracization based on economic or status supports the idea of a Sappho who wants to maintain an elite order of her society, of one who has an interest in maintaining social distinctions through social etiquette and dress. Sappho is adhering to a sumptuary code.⁵⁴ Sappho upholds her society's use of women as "the venue for competitive consumption".⁵⁵ In this poem, Sappho forms her vision of the ideal woman as one well-versed in social norms and aristocratic modes of presentation (i.e. comfortable and well-versed in the expectations and customs of elite society). Parker uses fragment 57 as evidence that clothes "are signs of status, a semiotic system."⁵⁶ Indeed, it is clear that for Sappho clothing has social signification.

Sappho extols natural adornment (garlands of flowers) in fragment 81.

σὺ δὲ στεφάνοις, ὦ Δίκα, πέρθεσθ' ἐράτοις φόβαισιν
 ὄρπακας ἀνήτω συναέρραις' ἀπάλαισι χέρσιν·
 εὐάνθεα ἴγάρῃ πέλεται καὶ Χάριτες μάκαιραι
 μᾶλλον ἴπροτερηνῃ, ἀστεφανώτοισι δ' ἀπυστρέφονται.

And you, Dika, affix a lovely wreath around your locks
 Weaving dill sprigs with soft hands:
 For the blessed Graces prefer to turn to a well-flowered girl
 But they twist away from those ungarlanded.

Here the divine Graces turn away in denial from those who do not present themselves with the appropriate floral raiment. The Graces of Sappho remind us of Athena in Book 6 of the *Iliad* who turns her cheek (ἀνένευε) in rejection of the Trojan women's appeals.

⁵⁴ For a discussion of sumptuary legislation, see Holt Parker, "Sappho's Public World," in *Women Poets in Ancient Greece and Rome*, edited by Ellen Greene (Norman, Oklahoma University Press): 9.

⁵⁵ Parker, "Sappho's Public World," 9.

⁵⁶ Parker, "Sappho's Public World," 13.

(*Iliad* 6.311) Instead, the Graces grant their favour to those who are εὐάνθεα or luxuriantly blooming. Sappho explicitly constructs a hierarchy of adornment, wherein she prioritizes natural wreaths of flowers as religiously correct in opposition to the lack of proper garb, which the divine disavow. In that Gaia herself “embroiders herself with many garlands” ποικίλλεται μὲν / γαῖα πολυστέφανος (fr. 168C),⁵⁷ this form of adornment through nature is an ordered imitation of the divine itself, and vice versa, as if Gaia herself accepts the Lesbian sumptuary code and elite ‘virtues’ of ἀβροσύνη. As Mikalson writes of later sacrificial rituals, “when an individual in a public context sacrificed, supervised sacrifices, [...] or performed other religious duties, he had one eye on the gods, one eye on his peers. He meant to please both.”⁵⁸ There are also possible ritual connotations.⁵⁹ Perhaps, if this song was ritually performed, certain garments had to be worn in order to show appropriate piety.⁶⁰ In any case, the poet creates a hierarchy of beauty for mortal women with the lack of adornment (and inappropriate adornment) as being the least pleasing, artificial trimmings as highly prized, and finally, as natural adornments – crowns of flowers – as the most pleasing to the gods.

We see in Sappho a very different conception of feminine adornment than that of the negative portrayals in Homer’s *dios apatē*⁶¹ and Hesiod’s “beautiful evil” (καλὸν κακὸν)

⁵⁷ This fragment was rejected by Lobel and Page, attributed by Wilamowitz, see: Sappho, Alcaeus, *Greek Lyric, Volume I*, ed. Campbell, 172.

⁵⁸ Mikalson, *New Aspects of Religion in Ancient Athens*, 250-251.

⁵⁹ See Mikalson, *New Aspects of Religion in Ancient Athens*, 254-263 for an interesting overview of adornment (and short discussion of the word κόσμος) in ritual and sacrificial contexts.

⁶⁰ For example, the presentation of the *peplos* to Athena at the Panathenaia. Further, the Sumerian myth of the goddess Inanna’s descent into the underworld is another instance of jewelry and adornment ritually performed, wherein Inanna adorns herself with a wig, special headgear, necklaces, and cosmetics, and then disrobes as she descends, removing one piece of adornment at each gate of the underworld. Her minister must dress in a pauper’s gown to rescue her.

⁶¹ *Iliad* 14.153-360 describes Hera’s seduction of Zeus, beginning with a variation of the Homeric arming type scene (14.161-189). The poet’s description of Hera’s adornment is immaculate, meticulously describing even the triple-drop mulberry earrings that Hera loops in her “well pierced ears” (λοβοῖσι

that is Pandora.⁶² However, there is also a significant political distinction between Hesiod and Sappho. Hesiod the Boeotian farmer is not Sappho of the Aeolic elite. Both Leslie Kurke and Ian Morris distinguish two ideologies of the archaic Greek world, between the hegemonic aristocratic elite and the rising ‘middling community’. Kurke studies the word and culture around ἀβροσύνη and its derivatives, finding Xenophanes disdaining “useless *habrosunai* from the Lydians”⁶³ and Semonides the iambic poet decrying the woman born of the ‘luxurious horse’ as lazy, and ever-preening, “a beautiful sight for others, but an evil for the one to whom she belongs”.⁶⁴ We might see Hesiod, though earlier, acting in this same vein of anti-aristocratic luxury. Kurke contrasts this scorn for luxury with the unmitigated love the archaic lyric poets Alcaeus, Stesichorus, and Anacreon show for adornment and delicacy. She declares the ἀβρότης (‘luxury’) a “style of life” that is adopted from the East by aristocrats as a conscious, distinguishing move to compete with a growing non-aristocratic class by lavishly enhancing their “style of expenditure.”⁶⁵ Morris discusses how “luxury bridged the gulf between mortals and gods. Sappho and her friends dwelled in a realm more like the heroic age than the seventh century. [...] Lavish

τρίγλινα μορόεντα, 14.182-3). Despite this clear fascination with the details of women’s adornment, Hera explicitly uses these arts to trick and seduce her husband to gain political advantage.

⁶² Both Hesiod’s *Theogony* and *Works and Days* describe Zeus’ creation of woman in retribution for Prometheus’ stolen gift of fire. Pandora, the καλὸν κακὸν, is constructed in body and mind by various gods. In the *Theogony*, Aphrodite “sashes and adorns her in silver dress” (ζῶσε δὲ καὶ κόσμησε... ἀργυφῆ ἐσθήτι; *Theogony* 573-4). In *Works and Days*, various goddesses take turns adorning her with sashes, jewelry, and floral wreaths (*Works and Days* 72-76). However, in her mind and nature Hermes puts “a dog-like mind and a thievish disposition” (ἐν δὲ θέμεν κύνεόν τε νόον καὶ ἐπικλοπον ἦθος; 67). As Nancy Rabinowitz writes, “The first female is a manufactured object who exists only once she has been clothed and furnished with jewelry and a floral headdress.” In Homer and Hesiod, the deceitful woman is her deceptive clothing.

⁶³ Leslie Kurke, “The Politics of ἀβροσύνη in Archaic Greece,” *Classical Antiquity* 11 (1992): 92.

⁶⁴ Kurke, “The Politics of ἀβροσύνη,” 95. Semonides is frequently critical of women, though it is embedded in an iambic sense of ‘humour.’

⁶⁵ Kurke, “The Politics of ἀβροσύνη,” 94.

display made the aristocracy something more than human.”⁶⁶ The encroachment of the middling class upon the aristocratic elite meant that “Would-be aristocrats who felt marginalized and unfairly excluded from power welcomed new and disruptive ideas, looking outward to the past, the East, and the divine for justification. Those who believed in middling values resisted these novelties.”⁶⁷ Sappho’s participation in this lifestyle of luxury not only shows her social interest in beauty but lays the framework for a religious motivation as well.

Sappho cannot be more explicit: she says, ἔγω δὲ φίλημι’ ἀβροσύναν, “but I love luxury” (fr. 58.15). Kurke declares this Sappho’s “programmatic political statement [which means] I align myself with an aristocratic elite that has strong ties with the East.”⁶⁸

Notably, in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, Pandora also “is exulting in her finery” (κόσμῳ ἀγαλλομένην).⁶⁹ Of course, in Hesiod, this reads as sheer vanity; Pandora delights in the very things that make her deceitful. However, Sappho’s brazen assertion states that “the brightness of the sun and beauty” (τὸ λά[μπρον ἔρος τῶελίω καὶ τὸ κά]λον; fr. 58.16) come from this desire. Kurke discusses the ἀβροσύνη of Pindar and concludes that Pindar associates ἀβροσύνη not only with Eastern and aristocratic values, but a poetic and athletic glory, a prize “not desired for its own sake, but for its power to purchase that most precious of epinician commodities, immortal fame through power.”⁷⁰ Pindar’s ἀβροσύνη is a fusion “of aristocratic luxury and civic benefaction.”⁷¹ Sappho’s aesthetics

⁶⁶ Ian Morris, “The Strong Principle of Equality,” in *Dēmokratia: Conversations on Democracies, Ancient and Modern*, ed. Josiah Ober and Charles Hedrick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996): 32.

⁶⁷ Morris, “The Strong Principle of Equality,” 33.

⁶⁸ Kurke, “Politics of ἀβροσύνη in Archaic Greece,” 96.

⁶⁹ Hesiod, *Theogony*, 587.

⁷⁰ Kurke, “Politics of ἀβροσύνη in Archaic Greece,” 110.

⁷¹ Kurke, “Politics of ἀβροσύνη in Archaic Greece,” 112.

of ἀβροσύνη share this fusion. As Mikalson writes, “We may owe much of the finest Greek architecture, sculpture, pottery, and poetry to the Greeks’ belief that ‘beauty’ pleased not only themselves but also the gods.”⁷² Sappho conceives of luxurious adornment as religiously correct. Thus, she poeticizes and immortalizes moments of this type of beauty as it exists in her present memory of the past desire between her and her beloved.

(iii) “the most beautiful thing on the dark earth”

Sappho 16 is critical to understanding Sappho’s aesthetics as she offers a personal, physical example of what she finds the most beautiful. She explicitly asks: what is the most κάλος on the dark earth? To a large extent, when Sappho answers the question with the phrase ‘ὄττω τις ἔραται’, there must be the necessary inquiry into *eros*. However, why does Sappho choose to use the superlative of κάλος?

οἱ μὲν ἰππήων στρότον οἱ δὲ πέσδων
οἱ δὲ νάων φαῖσ’ ἐπ[ι] γᾶν μέλαι[ν]αν
ἔ]μμεναι κάλλιστον, ἔγω δὲ κῆν’ ὄτ-
τω τις ἔραται·
πά]γχυ δ’ εὖμαρες σύνετον πόησαι
π]άντι τ[ο]ῦτ’, ἄ γὰρ πόλυ περσκέθρισα
κάλλος [ἀνθ]ρώπων Ἑλένα [τὸ]ν ἄνδρα
τὸν [πανάρ]ιστον
καλλ[ί]ποι]σ’ ἔβα ’ς Τροίαν πλέρι[σα
κωὺδ[ε] πα]ῖδος οὐδὲ φίλων το[κ]ήων
πάμ[παν] ἐμνάσθη, ἀλλὰ παράγαγ’ αὐταν
]σαν
ἄγν]αμπτον γὰρ [...] νόημα
]. . . κούφως τ[] νοήση·
. .]με νῦν Ἀνακτορί[ας ὀ]γέμναι-
σὺ] παρειόσας·
τᾶ]ς κε βολλοίμαν ἔρατόν τε βᾶμα
κάμάρυγμα λάμπρον ἴδην προσώπω
ἢ τὰ Λύδων ἄρματα κὰν ὄπλοισι
πεσδομ]άχεντας.

⁷² Mikalson, *New Aspects of Religion in Ancient Athens*, 264.

For some, an army of horsemen, for others of soldiers,
and others, of ships, they say, is the most beautiful thing
on the dark earth, but I say:
it is that one, whatever one loves.

It is entirely easy to make understood
to all, for she far surpassing
with respect to beauty of mankind, Helen,
left her most excellent husband.
She went to Troy, sailing,
and neither her child nor her dear parents,
did she take thought of at all, but let
someone lead her astray

For ... inflexible ... mind
lightly ... and she thinks
now, reminding me
of absent Anaktoria
I would rather see her lovely step
and the bright sparkle of her face
than the war-chariots of the Lydians or the armour
of those footsoldiers.

(Fr. 16)⁷³

Beginning with a priamel of potential examples of the κάλλιστον, Sappho 16 contrasts symbols of martial might with the offering: whatever one loves. She invokes Helen as the pinnacle of human beauty.⁷⁴ In a beautiful turn to the personal, Sappho expresses the beauty she finds in “absent Anaktoria”.

⁷³ Lines 10-16 are from those printed in West, “Nine Poems of Sappho,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 191 (2014): 2, from the 2014 papyrus discovery as laid out in S. Burris, J. Fish, and D. Obbink, “New Fragments of Book 1 of Sappho,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 189 (2014). Due to this papyrus, the lines “]-μεν οὐ δύνατον γενεσθαι /]-ν ἀνθρωπ[. . π]εδέχην δ’ ἄρασθαι / . . τ’ ἐξ ἀδοκί[τω” which were previously thought to close the poem, are now thought to be the beginning of a separate poem. See West, “Nine Poems of Sappho,” 3.

⁷⁴ This is the only extant use of the noun κάλλος in Sappho, the word which Konstan examines as the Greek word more appropriately defining physical and sexual beauty, see n12 above.

Sappho 16 has accumulated a veritable ocean of scholarship. The most common reading is similar to Page duBois', that Sappho is not writing exclusively a love poem for Anaktoria, but "something more, a sketch on the abstract notion of desire."⁷⁵ Most scholarship treats the idea of the κάλλιστον as a proof supporting the primacy of desire in Sappho's work, not as a concept of study in itself. Indeed, duBois writes, "She is defining desire with the vocabulary at hand."⁷⁶ The vocabulary at hand is that of physical beauty, and it should be considered in its own right. The relativity of beauty is clear in each extant stanza.⁷⁷ In the priamel, Sappho attributes cavalry, armies, and navies as potential examples of the κάλλιστον, and does not negate them, but forwards her own example. Helen, the prototype of beautiful women, is not enamoured of her own appearance, but of another's: if she is the most beautiful, should she not be the most beautiful to herself?⁷⁸ This stanza relies on the assumption that the most beautiful person has the judgment to ascertain another's beauty. Lastly, it is the "lovely step" and "bright sparkle" of Anaktoria that the poet would prefer to see, suggesting more a sense of personal wish than objectively offering an example of the most beautiful woman. Sappho would rather see Anaktoria than marvel at Helen.

The function of the inquiry into beauty is difficult to interpret. Zellner dislikes the use of the term 'definition' applied to Sappho's inquiry into beauty in this poem, suggesting that the discussion of the most beautiful thing is more likely "over the identity of the

⁷⁵ Page duBois, "Sappho and Helen," in *Women in the Ancient World: The Arethusa Papers*, eds. J. Peradotto and J.P. Sullivan (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984) 97.

⁷⁶ duBois, "Sappho and Helen," 97.

⁷⁷ The "relativity of aesthetic evaluations," as Harold Zellner puts it, is cause for major debate amongst scholars. He offers an excellent bibliography of the debate in Zellner, "Sappho's Alleged Proof of Aesthetic Relativity," in *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 47 (2007): 257n1.

⁷⁸ This stanza has brought about a fair share of academic angst, as scholars do not agree whether Helen is to represent the κάλλιστον, or the unnamed Paris, as he is the one beloved by Helen.

individual thing in question.”⁷⁹ Further, he wants to reframe the conversation around the ‘relativity’ of beauty to one examining the possibility of the inclusion or exclusion of the military examples with regard to the κάλλιστον.⁸⁰ His argument stems from seeing relativism in both of the opposing arguments over the meaning of ἔραται: either this love can include ships and navies, or only “what is sexually desired.”⁸¹ As Konstan writes,

The implicit premise in both versions is that *erôs* is aroused precisely by beauty and only beauty, but they play out differently. The first interpretation ascribes to Sappho a strongly relativist position concerning beauty: if you are passionate about a fleet or an army, then that is the most beautiful thing there is for you, since beauty is simply a function of what you love. If what you love happens to be a man or a woman, then that person will be the most beautiful thing to you, and this latter is Sappho’s own view, based on her personal preference.⁸²

Konstan takes issue with both views: the first, which “involves something of a catachresis in the use of the verb ἔραται”⁸³ as one does not generally feel *erôs* towards an army, and the second, which “entails a misuse of the word ‘beauty’”⁸⁴ as armies and navies are not appropriate referents for the adjective. Konstan and Zellner differ in their projects: Zellner finds “in a paradoxical way Sappho’s personal definition of what is the most beautiful both does *and* does not include the preferences of most people. Her only difference is that she is aware of it.”⁸⁵ Zellner also claims that “she appears to be making a general claim about what is most beautiful *to anyone*.”⁸⁶ Konstan, on the other hand, is looking to redefine the translation of the word κάλος, His project is to interpret the meaning of κάλος (καλός in non-Aeolic dialects) as primarily ‘fine’ or ‘excellent’,

⁷⁹ Zellner, “Sappho’s Alleged Proof,” 259

⁸⁰ Zellner, “Sappho’s Alleged Proof,” 260-261.

⁸¹ Zellner, “Sappho’s Alleged Proof,” 261.

⁸² Konstan, “Sappho 16,” 17.

⁸³ Konstan, “Sappho 16,” 20.

⁸⁴ Konstan, “Sappho 16,” 20.

⁸⁵ Papadimitropoulos, “Sappho Fr. 16,” 137.

⁸⁶ Zellner, “Sappho’s Alleged Proof,” 260.

offering the word κάλλος as the more accurate translation for beauty.⁸⁷ Sappho's only extant use of the noun κάλλος is in fragment 16. Konstan still acknowledges that "In archaic poetry, on the whole, *kalós* most often refers to the way things look, and is especially associated with brightness or glow."⁸⁸ However, he still asserts that its uses "betray the same wide range of meanings that we find in Homer, with a primary suggestion of visual appeal."⁸⁹ His conclusion is that, in Sappho 16, the discussion of the κάλλιστον is actually an inquiry into the 'finest' thing (as translated by Rayor and Lardinois), which is, according to Sappho's answer, "what one loves, by which she means a person who possesses *kállos* or beauty, for it is this that inspires erotic passion."⁹⁰ He explains this again, "*kállos* is not just a fine thing (*kalón*), it is the finest of all (*kálliston*)."⁹¹ Further, "the finest thing is just what excites erotic passion, and that is *kállos*."⁹² On Konstan's account, the answer to the question 'what comes first: beauty or desire?' is beauty. Still, it seems strange that Sappho would use the superlative κάλλιστον to mean something 'best' in the same vein as the ἄριστος when she would define it as beauty anyway.⁹³ As previously discussed, κάλος has the sense of being ethically good in addition to physically good looking. Thus, the κάλλιστον does have the sense of being

⁸⁷ Konstan's article uses primarily Homeric examples but does not fully analyze the listed Sapphic uses of κάλος. See Konstan, "Sappho 16," 22-23. He also notes that her usage of the word "modifies some of the conclusions in *Beauty: The Fortunes of an Ancient Greek Idea* ("Sappho 16," 22n19). This book has an excellent overview of the term κάλλος and beauty in the Greek tradition, although I disagree with his conclusions on the sense of κάλος.

⁸⁸ Konstan, "Sappho 16," 22.

⁸⁹ Konstan, "Sappho 16," 22.

⁹⁰ Konstan, "Sappho 16," 24.

⁹¹ Konstan, "Sappho 16," 24.

⁹² Konstan, "Sappho 16," 26.

⁹³ If the thing that is 'best' or 'finest' is whatever is beautiful (i.e. something that looks or sounds best), then is Sappho saying "the best thing is the best looking thing" and stripping it of any positive ethical connotation? Perhaps this is the sense of

‘the finest thing’, as Konstan writes, but it is still not stripped of its meaning ‘most beautiful’. It contains both.

We may compare Sappho 16 to fragment 22.11-14: “yearning flutters about you, beautiful one: for her dress thrilled you upon seeing it, and I rejoice” (πόθος τ.[/ ἀμφιπόταται / τὰν κάλαν / ἃ γὰρ κατάγωγις αὔτα[ς σ’ / ἐπτόαισ’ ἴδοισαν, ἐγὼ δὲ χαίρω·).

This moment strengthens the poetic connection between desire, sight, and beauty. Seeing the visual body replete with dress can stir up the erotic desire.⁹⁴ In this fragment, at least, it seems adornment (and so visual beauty) establishes grounds for desire. It is also suggested, tentatively, that in desiring the other, the girl is κάλαν because of her πόθος (yearning, or desire). There is a reciprocity between desire and beauty: being desired makes one beautiful (whatever one loves is the most beautiful thing). In turn, being beautiful (the lovely step and bright sparkle of Anactoria) makes one desirable.

The word κάλος in Sappho frequently refers to an individual’s physical good looks and sexual desirability. It refers to objects of fashion and adornment which the poet describes with care. Further, the adornment associated with the women contributes to their identity, as in vase painting. For Sappho, to be beautiful is also to be desirable. There is, perhaps, even a sense in which ‘being good’ can lead to beautification. As seen in fragment 57, Sappho upholds a sartorial expectations to maintain social distinctions. The ethical implications of being κάλος are also political. Finally, certain types of adornment, such as wreaths of flowers, are pleasing to the divine: visual beauty and adornment are not

⁹⁴ Archaic *korai* were sculpted with “rich patterns and teasing layers of the drapery” which “give the eye much more to explore, and turn viewing the fully dressed woman into a tactile experience.” See Osborne, *Archaic and Classical Greek Art*, 83-84.

merely representative of something more purely good, but rather an indication of one ordering oneself correctly both socially and religiously.

Chapter 3. Nature

The poetry of Sappho abounds in natural imagery. Floral motifs recur aplenty. Nature is a key component in Sappho's aesthetics, since through it she explores the tranquility one can experience in moments of great visual beauty. Fragment 2 is a particular instance of Sappho creating a world that uses her aesthetic language to the fullest. It is easy to pass over Sappho's fragment 2 as a simple description of a lovely landscape. It is steeped in the splendour of natural beauty, unusually so for a hymn. Drawing out the significance of this landscape is not straightforward. In analyzing the imagery and setting of this poem, we find that Sappho uses a complex combination of symbols and imagery to create a paradise for herself. Synaesthetic elements of the poem illustrate instances of beauty creating tranquility. In Sappho, even nature can be luxurious. The poet uses ritual aspects of the grove to imbue the natural world with religious beauty. Further, this place of beauty brings together the divine, mortal, and natural worlds. That Sappho sings the place into being emphasizes the effects of a beautiful song (perhaps as the κῶμα of the poem). Finally, understanding reactions to beauty in a Homeric context acts as a guide to Sappho's anticipated response to her images of beauty.

Scattered throughout Sappho's poems are floral epithets and imagery. For example, χρυσίοισιν ἀνθέμοισιν (golden flowers) of 132 describe the appearance of Kleis. Further, the στεφάνοισιν ἀνθέων ἐριθαλέων (garland of very-blooming flowers), the πόρφυρον ἄνθος or ὑάκινθον (the purple flower, the hyacinth) of fragment 105B, are just some examples of the poet's frequent use of flowers. Sappho favours the epithet ἰόκολπον, "violet-lapped" or "violet-robed", singing "might sing of your dearness with the violet-

robed bride” (σὰν ἀείδοιν φ[ιλό]τατα καὶ νύμ- / φας ἰοκόλπω; fr. 30.4-5). This may be a shorthand for Sappho to refer to a bridal gown.⁹⁵ The “daughter of the son Kronos” (τα παῖδα Κρονίδα τὰν ἰόκ[ολπ]ον) is also violet-robed (fr. 103). Finally, roses occur in abundance. There are the roses of Pieria (βρόδων / τῶν ἐκ Πιερίας; fr. 55.2-3) which stand for the Muses as I will argue below. Roses bloom in fragment 96 along with other flowers and are braided in a wreath with violets and crocuses in fragment 94. Goddesses are rose-armed:⁹⁶ “rose-armed, holy Graces” (βροδοπάχες ἄγναι Χάριτες; fr. 53), and rose-armed Dawn carries Tithonus, “rose-armed Dawn” (βροδόπαχυν Αὔων; fr. 58.9). The moon, similarly, is “rose-fingered” (βροδοδάκτυλος σελάννα; fr.96.8). The recurrence of these floral motifs is important because, as Irwin writes, in early poetry before the boundaries between senses had been firmly established, these “prompt us to think of the delicacy, fragrance and beauty of women’s skin.”⁹⁷ Irwin sees in flowers a “continuum of the natural and divine world,”⁹⁸ a “kinship”⁹⁹ in which the realms are understood as shared and familiar. In Sappho, flowers are emblematic of this connection. In Fragment 2, Sappho’s aesthetic language animates her poetry at its fullest. Nature is resplendent. The poem focuses on a description of a grove:

⁹⁵ Avagianou writes, “As far as the appearance of bride and groom is concerned, literary sources emphasize their distinctive appearance,” and notes that “The bride wore special sandals...Her dress was violet-coloured, according to Sappho, or πορφύρα according to Achilles Tatius. She wore elaborate jewellery...Bride and groom wore wreathes.” See Avagianou, *Sacred Marriage in the Rituals of Greek Religion* (Bern: P. Lang, 1991): 7 and 7n38.

⁹⁶ For reasoning behind the translation of ‘rose-armed’ instead of ‘rosy-armed’ see Eleanor Irwin, “The Crocus and the Rose: A Study of the Interrelationship between the Natural and the Divine World in Early Greek Poetry,” in *Greek Poetry and Philosophy: Studies in Honour of Leonard Woodbury*, ed. D. Gerber (Chico: Scholars Press, 1984): 165-167.

⁹⁷ M. Eleanor Irwin, “Roses and the Bodies of Beautiful Women in Greek Poetry,” *Echos du monde Classique: Classical views, Volume XXXVIII* 13, no. 1 (1994): 12.

⁹⁸ Irwin, “The Crocus and the Rose,” 168.

⁹⁹ Irwin, “The Crocus and the Rose,” 149.

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

ἐν δ' ὕδωρ ψῦχρον κελάδει δι' ὕσδων
 μαλίνων, βρόδοισι δὲ παῖς ὁ χῶρος
 ἐσκίαστ', αἰθυσσομένων δὲ φύλλων
 κῶμα κατέρρει·

ἐν δὲ λείμων ἰππόβοτος τέθαλεν
 ἡρινίοισιν ἄνθεσιν, αἱ δ' ἄητοι
 μέλλιχα πνέοισιν [
 []

ἔνθα δὴ σὺ . . . ἐλοῖσα Κύπρι,
 χρυσίασιν ἐν κυλίκεσσιν ἄβρωσ
 ὀμμεμείχμενον θαλίασι νέκταρ
 οἰνοχόαισον

Come to me from Crete to this hallowed
 temple, where stands your graceful grove
 of apple trees, the altars smoking
 with frankincense.

And in this place, cold water murmurs through boughs
 of an apple tree; with roses, the place is shadowed
 all over; from quivering leaves
 a dreamdaze slips down.

And in this place, the horse-grazing meadow has bloomed
 with springtime flowers, and breezes
 sweetly blow
 []

Here you taking [...], Cypris,
 in golden cups delicately,
 pour out
 nectar mixing with festivities¹⁰⁰

Beginning with a beckoning to a goddess, the poet asks the unnamed divinity to come to the grove in which a temple to her stands. The grove is resplendent with flowers, shaking

¹⁰⁰ The poem was found, rather unusually, on a potsherd in 1937.

leaves, apple trees, and a stream runs through the middle. In the middle of the poem, a κῶμα falls, the strange dreamy sleep usually initiated by the divine. By the last stanza, it seems Cypris has arrived and is then asked by the poet to mix nectar with festivities in an unusual combination of imagery. That this poem is a cletic hymn, a ritual summoning of a divinity,¹⁰¹ calling Aphrodite to this grove is a matter of debate. Burnett and Heikkilä both assert the cletic nature of the poem, while McEvilley and Yatromanolakis try to disavow the notion that the poem is a traditional ritual.¹⁰² Yatromanolakis is succinct: “Sappho here uses diverse ritual discourses or imagery which allude to different ritualized, performative contexts. The song does not represent a cultic hymn.”¹⁰³ In other words, Yatromanolakis, whose project is to problematize (or at least recognize a greater amount of nuance within) genre classifications in archaic lyric, would see fragment 2 as a descriptive poem that draws on the performative context of ritual (indeed that “diverse ritual discourses are embedded in her songs”)¹⁰⁴ in order to create “her own multi-faceted performative interaction with her audiences.”¹⁰⁵ McEvilley’s analysis is much the same, in that Sappho’s poems “[present] a general picture of life” and that the grove is “a symbol and as such has not one identity only, but many. It lies not only...in the external world, but in the imagination of the poet.”¹⁰⁶ Simply, he writes that fragment 2 is one of a few Sapphic poems that act as “fictionalized pictures of rites.”¹⁰⁷ The more traditional

¹⁰¹ For a good discussion of this genre, see Jan Bremer, “Greek Hymns,” in *Faith Hope and Worship: Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World*, ed. H. S. Versnel (Leiden: Brill, 1981). For a thorough examination of divine epiphany, see Georgia Petridou, *Divine Epiphany in Greek Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁰² Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, 276, Heikkilä, “Sappho Fragment Two L.-P.,” 48, and McEvilley, “Sappho, Fragment Two,” 331-333, Yatromanolakis, “Ritual Poetics,” 65.

¹⁰³ Yatromanolakis, “Ritual Poetics,” 65.

¹⁰⁴ Yatromanolakis, “Ritual Poetics,” 66.

¹⁰⁵ Yatromanolakis, “Ritual Poetics,” 65.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas McEvilley, “Sappho, Fragment Two,” *Phoenix* 26, no. 4 (Winter, 1972), 333.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas McEvilley, “Sapphic Imagery and Fragment 96,” *Hermes* 101 (1973), 267.

approach is that of Heikkilä, who notes that there are some differences between this poem and more conventional cletic hymns. Heikkilä writes, “Already the function of Sappho’s poem as a cletic hymn demands a different and more personal approach.”¹⁰⁸ Heikkilä sees the poem “as a curious mixture of personal address and generalizing omissions”¹⁰⁹ specifically with regard to the lack of the divinity’s name until the latter section of the poem. More recent scholarship has recognized that looking to the literary value of the poems may be dismissive of their religious contexts: Boychenko writes on the hymns of Sappho and Alcaeus “which are often lumped together as symposiastic songs with an ambiguous connection to hymns and are frequently dismissed as merely literary.”¹¹⁰ However, she also notes that there are varieties within the genre of Lesbian hymns.

Fragment 2 is an unusual case in which there are clearly ritual elements, but no clear rite other than the invocation to Aphrodite. It is a poem that closes in upon itself; the grove is hermetic and sprouts more questions than answers. McEvelley asks, “The central question in the interpretation of ode 2 is indeed the central question for all of the Sapphic fragments: Does she mean it? Or, we might ask, What kind of song is it? A cult song? A record of personal experience? A reverie? A Conceit?”¹¹¹ The poem is quintessentially Sapphic, the scene is one in which the audience is invited into ‘Sappho’s world’. It is as if we can read this scene into other poems, in an intratextual analysis that often seems necessary for understanding fragments of Sappho’s poetry. As McEvelley writes, “The

¹⁰⁸ Kai Heikkilä, “Sappho Fragment 2 L.-P.: Some Homeric Readings,” *Arctos: Acta Philologica Fennica*, Vol. 26 (1992): 42.

¹⁰⁹ Heikkilä, “Sappho Fragment 2 L.-P.,” 42-43.

¹¹⁰ Leanna Boychenko, “Sappho or Alcaeus: Authors and Genres of Archaic Hymns,” in *Authorship and Greek Song: Authority, Authenticity, and Performance: Studies in Archaic and Classical Greek Song*, Vol. 3, ed. E. Bakker (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 246.

¹¹¹ McEvelley, “Sappho, Fragment Two,” 327.

poem presents a general picture of life through which...much of the rest of Sappho's poetry...should be seen."¹¹² Fragment 2, the grove, exists as a backdrop to the rest of Sappho's poetry. Yatromanolakis characterizes Sappho's poetry as "interdiscursivity of diverse ritual discourses and ritual imagery" and suggests that her "'literary' production should be perceived as a communicative aesthetic system."¹¹³ In her imagination, all of the love affairs, relationships, and leisure time exist in this dream world of natural luxury. It has also been suggested that the emphasis on understanding the genre and context of a poem has become so bold that it peripheralizes the "Werkästhetik" i.e. "thematic material, motifs, diction, structure, style and attitudes" of the poetry itself.¹¹⁴ That said, Mikalson develops the useful and pertinent idea that Greek ritual incorporated many aspects of visual beauty, in part to please the gods as well as the social norms of their time.¹¹⁵ Thus, I suggest that, whether Sappho is recounting a ritual or practicing one, she is incorporating its elements of beauty for her own purposes. Sappho's lyrics are entwined in the same poetic world of literary imagination and religious ritual. The ambient beauty of this grove, like a lingering perfume, suffuses the poetry of Sappho.

(i) Fullness in the natural world

Sappho takes great care to show the abundance and fullness of nature in fragment 2. The natural world springs to life in metaphorical and imagistic splendour. Hermogenes first noted the particular pleasantness of this poem.

Hermog. *Id.* 2. 4

¹¹² McEvilley, "Sappho, Fragment Two," 333.

¹¹³ Yatromanolakis, "Ritual Poetics," 63.

¹¹⁴ Henderson, "Received Responses: Ancient Testimony on Greek Lyric Imagery," *Acta Classica XLI* (1998), 7.

¹¹⁵ Mikalson, *New Aspects of Religion in Ancient Athens*, 250-253.

καὶ (sc. τῶν ἡδονῶν) τὰς μὲν οὐκ αἰσχρὰς ἔστιν ἀπλῶς ἐκφράζειν, οἷον κάλλος χωρίου καὶ φυτείας διαφόρους καὶ ῥευμάτων ποικιλίας καὶ ὅσα τοιαῦτα· ταῦτα γὰρ καὶ τῆ ὄψει προσβάλλει ἡδονὴν ὀρώμενα καὶ τῆ ἀκοῆ, ὅτε ἐξαγγέλλει τις, ὥσπερ ἡ Σαπφῶ ἄμφι δὲ ὕδωρ ψυχρὸν κελαδεῖ δι' ὕσδων μαλίνων καὶ αἰθυσσομένων δὲ φύλλων κῶμα καταρρεῖ καὶ ὅσα πρὸ τούτων τε καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα εἴρηται.

And it is not ill-suited to simply explain the pleasures which are not shameful, such as the beauty of a place, and the differences of plantings, and the variations of streams, and the like; for these things procure pleasure for the eye, when seen, and to the ear, when spoken, as in in Sappho: “And in that place, cold water murmurs through boughs of an apple tree” and “near quivering leaves a trance slips down” and all which is said before these things and after.

Hermogenes, *Kinds of Style*, *Id.* 2. 4

Hermogenes accentuates ‘the beauty of a place’, specifying ‘the variety of plant-life’ and ‘the diversity of streams’. But the song is far from a biologist’s journal documenting an array of natural phenomena. Instead, the poem paints a portrait of a grove in fertile abundance, nature *in excelsis*, the natural world in full bloom and highlights this splendour in the context of a god’s dwelling, as a holy place. Burnett calls this poem’s “concentration upon place [...] its central oddity as prayer, but also its central charm as prayer.”¹¹⁶ Thus, it is necessary to contextualize the role of natural landscape in the ancient world. Annette Giesecke writes that “the literature of the Archaic and Classical periods is relatively sparing in protracted references to the natural world, and where they do appear, Nature remains at most a frame or scenic backdrop for the human drama.”¹¹⁷ Giesecke reflects Adam Parry’s earlier consideration of the Greek landscape. Parry writes, ““Literature is essentially concerned with human feelings, actions, and judgments. Natural scenes [...] have a metaphorical value: they are ultimately figures of something human.”¹¹⁸ Nature in early Greek literature, in this view, is a straightforward reflection of

¹¹⁶ Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, 263.

¹¹⁷ Giesecke, *The Epic City*, 51.

¹¹⁸ Parry, “Landscape in Greek Poetry,” 3.

humanity. However, the experience of reading fragment 2 problematizes this view – Sappho only depicts the barest of human narratives, a suppliant calling to a god. The audience sees no girls playing or ex-lovers mourning. It is difficult to read nature in this poem as a “scenic backdrop” when it is the very feature of the poem. Thus, Sappho’s κλῆσις must be considered carefully, as must the references to human presence in the grove. Giesecke writes: “This is not merely a sentimental landscape conjured by a painterly and lovesick imagination.”¹¹⁹ The pleasantries which Hermogenes’ draws out are not merely those of whimsical romanticism, but further indicative of Sappho’s interest in luxury and abundance.

(ii) Grove as *locus amoenus*

The abundance of natural imagery in Sappho’s song is the ideal *locus amoenus*. The landscapes of early lyric tended to be “rural, sensual, and related to young female sexuality and rites of passage,”¹²⁰ and in fragment 2 we find an early version of the *locus amoenus*. Hinds finds in this *topos* the “pervasive negotiation between the natural and the supernatural inscribed in the landscape tradition.”¹²¹ An analysis of the landscape in fragment 2 also illustrates this negotiation. Hinds sees the “supernatural charge” as that which endures “as one of the main elements which gives to bucolic or pastoral poetry its sense of idealized ambience apart from the quotidian realities of life in a rural economy.”¹²² Burnett alludes to the grove’s similarity to the *locus amoenus* but divorces the grove from the *topos*’ dark underbelly. She describes the grove as “a garden of love,

¹¹⁹ Giesecke, *The Epic City*, 53.

¹²⁰ Nancy Worman, “Stylistic Landscapes,” in *A Companion to Ancient Aesthetics*, eds. Pierre Destrée and Penelope Murray (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 401.

¹²¹ Stephen Hinds, “Landscape with Figures: Aesthetics of Place in the *Metamorphoses* and its Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. P. Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 124.

¹²² Hinds, “Landscape with Figures,” 125.

but it is at once more tranquil and more sensual than those flower-strewn fields that saw the rapes of Persephone, Europa, and Creusa and so many other ladies of mythology.”¹²³

Hinds lists “what is precious” to the *topos*:

the appeal to a shared, familiar, and specifically visualized arrangement of shade and foliage; a sense of the symbolic charge linking setting and inhabitant; an implicit belief in the mutual dependence of natural fertility and the fertility of the human imagination which describes it.¹²⁴

Each aspect of the *locus amoenus* is crucial to reading Sappho’s fragment 2.

Apple trees and branches are mentioned twice, there is a cold brook that babbles, roses are so multitudinous that they shroud the whole area in shadow. The meadow covered in roses conjures the phrase ‘rose-dark’, like Homer’s wine-dark seas. Further, the meadowed area is abloom in springtime despite also being horse fodder. Winds blow sweetly (“like honey” in Carson’s translation,¹²⁵ drawing on the ‘μέλλι-’ prefix), and most unusually – from twinkling leaves, a κῶμα drops – as if the sparkling morning dew from leaves shaken by the gentle airs passes down a breath of its own trance-like slumber. Sappho emphasizes the sense of place through the use of two ἐν adverbs to begin stanzas two and three, and the adverb ἐνθα to further reinforce the significance of this grove. I have chosen a stronger deictic phrase to translate ἐν than most, providing “in this place” to the generally preferred “therein” given by Campbell and McEvilley. Sappho’s duplication of ἐν coupled with ἐνθα perhaps even hints at the later Latin formula *est locus* which initiates a ‘once upon a time’ tale of a “timeless present”, conventional to Latin *locus amoenus* descriptions;¹²⁶ at the very least, it clearly points to

¹²³ Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, 270.

¹²⁴ Hinds, “Landscape with Figures,” 148.

¹²⁵ Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 7.

¹²⁶ Hinds, “Landscape with Figures,” 126.

the significance of this grove. This translation highlights the significance of locality to the poem, which is in turn bolstered by the amount and the unusual character of the natural imagery. The natural world is resplendent: Sappho depicts natural fullness as a refuge. Sappho may even be destabilizing the conventions of landscape: her poetic power creates sanctuary in a space so often filled with danger.

(iii) Synaesthetic language

Various scholars have noted the fragment 2's surreal quality. The most prominent example of this 'surrealism' is in Sappho's synaesthetic language. Fragment 2 uses sensory imagery in almost Baroque excess. Each line piles on new combinations of lush imagery. It is in fact fragment 2 that the editors of *Synaesthesia and the Ancient Senses* chose to exemplify the "thickly synaesthetic ancient material available to us."¹²⁷ Further, Butler and Purves write, "Sappho allows this imagery to stray into a realm that is oneiric almost to the point of being surreal."¹²⁸ The explosion of sensorial details creates the beauty of this fragment. Burnett is correct that "there is neither sign nor symbol of any mortal approach."¹²⁹ However, the grove still contains movement, just not that of humans. Nature moves in it with punching dynamism. Not only is the river flowing, but Sappho uses the verb *κελάδει*, a verb which implies the sound of trickling, streaming water. *Κελάδει* combines the movement and flow of the brook and the sound of its babbling through the grove. Amy Lather studies this verb in Pindar, using this Sapphic instance to demonstrate that the verb can indicate streams or rivers as "mainstays of the

¹²⁷ Shane Butler and Alex Purves, "Introduction," in *Synaesthesia and the Ancient Senses*, eds. Shane Butler and Alex Purves (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.

¹²⁸ Butler and Purves, "Introduction," 5.

¹²⁹ Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, 270.

locus amoenus.”¹³⁰ She notes that the term has its “roots in the sound of running water” and cites a Homeric verse as proof of “the onomatopoeic potential of the word to audibly reproduce the flowing liquidity it denotes.”¹³¹ Indeed, in the first line of the second stanza, Sappho’s metre mimics the sliding trickle of icy meadow water as the κελάδει glides through the choriamb in the middle of the hendecasyllabic line, rippling between the long pebbly syllables of the ψῦχρον ὕσδων. The grammar mixes consonants and vowels. Sappho blends the sensory aspects of nature together to create a dynamic and heightened mood.

There is also divine motion in this poem. The speaker beseeches Aphrodite to hurry to the temple, indicating motion towards, with the rising smoke acting as beacon. The shadow spreading from the roses is mimicked by the outwardly blooming meadow, and in between these the coma/trance falls. Movement is in all directions, inwards with Aphrodite’s coming, spreading outwards from the flowers and even all around as the winds blow. We might even infer that the leaves are flickering¹³² happily in this breeze.

The poet inundates the listener with this barrage of sensorial imagery, creating a synaesthetic effect of overabundant beauty and engulfs the listener with an experience of this natural environment. The scent of the roses mix with frankincense, and their dense petals shade the grove in a play on the evocative senses of the rose. The cold water, the coarse meadow grass, the flower petals, and metallic-smooth cups, can all be touched and

¹³⁰ Amy Lather, “Pindar’s Water Music: The Acoustics and Dynamics of the *Kelados*,” *Classical Philology* 114, no. 3 (July 2019): 470.

¹³¹ Lather, “Pindar’s Water Music,” 470.

¹³² Butler and Purves (2015) note that αἰθροσομένων is rare, and bears a similarity to αἶθω *LSJ* s.v. burn, kindle, glimmer, 5. This is another instance of Sappho’s synaesthetic imagery as the listener sees light flicker on the leaves and feels and hears the leaves rustle in the wind.

felt. The verbs of the poem are primarily in the present, and the majority indicate movement or change. ἐσκίαστ' is the only verb in the aorist, giving the barest sense of context to this setting – at one point in the past, enough roses emerged so as to engulf the meadow in shade, either through their shadows or by the sheer volume of their blooms. Similarly, τέθαλεν in the perfect suggests that the meadow has come into the very fullest of its possible blooming state; the perfect connotes the resplendent present moment of abounding floral and horticultural possibilities. This verb, from θάλλω (to swell, to bloom, to be luxuriant), is paired with other words indicating abundance and bloom, the participle τεθυμιάμενοι appears like billowing smoke, and the bounteous prosperity of the θαλίασι lends an air of festive jubilation. Πνέουσιν activates the blowing breezes, modifying the verb with the adverb μέλλιχα. The honied air is thick with the smoke of frankincense. The consonantal *pne-* seems tactile in contrast with the previous airy, vowel-filled line, so that the audience can sense the winds caressing the leaves softly. Sappho mixes and includes all elements. The earth of the grove and meadow, the fire of the altars, the water of the brook, and the air of the breeze. The barrage of images bursts out in technicolour array.

Otherworldliness is latent in the mixed imagery Sappho describes. Anne Carson also writes on the synaesthetic quality of the poem : “Otherworldliness is intensified in Sappho’s poem by the synaesthetic quality of her *kōma* [...] Sappho’s adjective *aithussomenon* (“radiant-shaking,” 7) blends visual and tactile perceptions with a sound of rushing emptiness.”¹³³ The poet illustrates a vision of the grove that is seemingly isolated area, detached from any actual geographic place. There has been much debate

¹³³ Carson, *If Not, Winter*, 359.

surrounding this issue: while Sappho explicitly refers to ἡρινοὶ ἄνθη – flowers of ‘springtime’, Burnett lays out the historiographical case for whether the song can rightfully be called a “spring poem” for the flowers and apples bloom in different seasons and whether the ‘time’ of the poem occurs in the morning, noon, evening, or night-long.¹³⁴ Most of these arguments look to the floral arrangements mentioned and the fact that roses may not cast shadow at noon. Burnett concludes that “These contradictory opinions all reflect the fact that the poem does not describe a specific temporal moment in the day any more than it does a calendar season or a geographical location”¹³⁵ and this accords with McEvelley who considers the poem a “spiritual geography.”¹³⁶ A later feature of the *locus amoenus* will be the ‘perpetual spring’, the timeless vernal abundance of Ovid’s *perpetuum uer est* (*Met.* 5.391).¹³⁷ Sappho’s grove, too, depicts an endlessly recurring moment of impossible everlasting abundance.¹³⁸

Beyond the indeterminate time of the poem, McEvelley describes the grove as “a magical scene, like the house in the woods that is stumbled upon in fairy tales, where everything stands in readiness, but no one is home.”¹³⁹ The poem vacillates between depicting nature at its most brilliant and a strange lack of human activity. Burnett describes the poem as imbued with “magic stillness.”¹⁴⁰ While there are elements of human presence, the humans themselves are notably absent. Burnett suggests that the κῶμα “peoples Sappho’s

¹³⁴ Burnett includes an extensive catalogue of these arguments in *Three Archaic Poets*, 263-4 and note 90.

¹³⁵ Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, 263n90.

¹³⁶ McEvelley, “Sappho, Fragment Two,” 328.

¹³⁷ Hinds, “Landscape with Figures,” 124.

¹³⁸ It is almost like the *memento mori* of Dutch *vanitas* paintings of spring flowers paired with autumnal fruit: the impossibility of these flowers’ existence together is a reminder of their necessary death and decay.

¹³⁹ McEvelley, “Sappho, Fragment Two,” 332.

¹⁴⁰ Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, 270.

glade” as “trance demands the entranced just as sleep demands a sleeper.”¹⁴¹ This is unconvincing (the κῶμα is an unusual hint of magic in Sappho, and demands a more thorough analysis), and anyhow, sleeping humans are hardly an active presence. The only trace of tangible humanity (that is not a byproduct of human contact) is simply the poet’s call to Aphrodite. The grove is so extraordinarily illusory – the impossible mixtures of seasons, of time, of metaphor and image – all conjured by the song of a poet. One might wonder whether Sappho’s ‘pleasant place’ would include the circle of young women she writes about with love. The poem, however, for all its bombastic visual imagery, is subtle in meaning. Girls in the meadow are perhaps too reminiscent of stories of maidens violently taken. Sappho rarely sings of girls who have not caused her pain. This grove is tranquil splendour above all.

(iv) The grove

It is important that we examine the nature of the ἄλσος which encloses all this imagery. Worman writes that poetic landscapes “tend to foreground their physical inhabitation, privileging a viewer [...] of the setting’s features and thereby promoting the poet-performer’s [...] skills. These are thus not neutral spaces, since they are always bound up with aesthetic negotiations that open out onto ethical and political valuations.” Sappho’s creative power is already clear; her poetry can contain abundant beauty in the form of ideal representations of nature. An analysis of the ἄλσος will begin to show the value and purpose Sappho sees in using the imagery of the natural world.

¹⁴¹ Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, 271.

It is important to contextualize the nature of this place, the ἄλλος, which had specific attributes and properties. The ἄλλος is “a delimited place sacred to the gods” that can exist “in the city and on citadels, in the country, in the mountains, and even in forests” that necessarily features a spring.¹⁴² The ἄλλος of fragment 2 exists in a voided space – Sappho does not tell us if this grove rests in the city or the countryside, only that it is not in Crete and that the singer is located within its boundaries. Pierre Bonnechere understands the ἄλλος as the “a constituent of the landscape that Greek thought almost immediately suffused with religious meaning” rather than simply as mere decorative landscape.¹⁴³ Sappho also includes the λείμων, a meadow “flowering in the spring”, which has cultic elements and can act as a passage to the underworld.¹⁴⁴ The ἄλλος is Nature “modified by some human additions” and Bonnechere lists these additions as generally ritual elements: “an altar, a statue, a tomb [...] or perhaps a temple [...] a cultic ensemble.”¹⁴⁵ Sappho uses this cultic spot to illustrate the heights of her poetic prowess. She uses the ἄλλος as symbolic representation of the mixture between the natural world and human worship (imaged in the temple, the altars, the torches), but then blurs this natural reality by obscuring the setting’s time of night or day, spring or summer. Turyn calls the three final stanzas an “ἔκφορσις of the landscape.”¹⁴⁶ It also appears as an ekphrastic depiction of landscape, dream, and paradisiac imagination. The ἄλλος is in

¹⁴² Pierre Bonnechere, “The Place of the Sacred Grove (*Alsos*) in the Mantic Rituals of Greece: The Example of the *Alsos* of Trophonios at Lebadeia (Boeotia),” in *Sacred Gardens & Landscapes: Ritual and Agency*, ed. M. Conan (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2007), 19.

¹⁴³ Bonnechere, “The Place of the Sacred Grove,” 20 and 20n23.

¹⁴⁴ Bonnechere, “The Place of the Sacred Grove,” 20.

¹⁴⁵ Bonnechere, “The Place of the Sacred Grove,” 20.

¹⁴⁶ Alexander Turyn, “The Sapphic Ostrakon,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, vol. 73 (1942), 312.

between cultivated garden and wilderness.¹⁴⁷ The ἄλλος itself “blend[s] the wild and the cultivated [as] the most emblematic of the medial nature.”¹⁴⁸ Sappho’s sacred grove is a place of imagination and fantasy, as an imagined work of art. Bonnechere attests to the ritual nature of the ἄλλος, writing that “In a place where divine contact is naturally established, the rituals [performed in the ἄλλος] appear to be themselves a way to interconnect two distinct ontological levels.”¹⁴⁹ It is fitting, then, that this is the place to which Sappho calls Aphrodite.

Burnett notes that the grove is “apparently...separated from the world, yet linked to it as well, by this outer zone that is at once wilder and more profane.”¹⁵⁰ If the first stanza immediately draws the goddess in, and specifically to the temple, it is as if Sappho wishes her to appear in that spot and look out to the spaces populated by Sappho’s words. She sees first the dedication to her divinity in the temple and altars, set in a grove, and then views the natural world through Sappho’s words. Sappho shows the full power of her poetic capability with the creation of a religious space through words. This space is a liminal point of interaction, between suppliant and god, between poet and audience.

Giesecke describes the grove of fragment 2 as a *temenos*, a “space in Nature filled with divinity but inscribed by humankind for the purpose of interaction with the divine.”¹⁵¹

Sappho’s ‘inscriptions’ in the form of the temple and altars combine with the natural flora to create a beautiful space acceptable for a divinity’s presence. Sappho displays the

¹⁴⁷ It may be a stretch to call this poem ekphrastic, but it is not far off the mark in that there is precedent for descriptions of Greek gardens dating back to Homer. For more on this subject, see Worman, “Stylized Landscapes,” 410ff.

¹⁴⁸ Bonnechere, “The Place of the Sacred Grove,” 26.

¹⁴⁹ Bonnechere, “The Place of the Sacred Grove,” 41.

¹⁵⁰ Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, 264-265.

¹⁵¹ Giesecke, *The Epic City*, 53.

fullness she can conjure in imagery, and language, and calls Aphrodite to this spot. The poem intimates the notion of ritual quite entrancingly – yet there is no ritual to be seen.

(v) The luxury of the natural world

Representations of the natural world are not immune to ethical judgments. Nancy Worman draws out the luxury embedded in Homer’s description of Calypso’s grotto. She observes that “the depiction urges the prizing of richness and fullness over, say, austerity, simplicity, and restraint – attributes that characterize ethical and economic values as well as aesthetic ones.”¹⁵² The natural world signifies ostentation just as well as fine jewelry and clothing. This poem abounds with Sappho’s aesthetic vocabulary.¹⁵³ Not only is the grove itself described as *χαρίεις*, but floral imagery also abounds, and in the final stanza Sappho couples the adverb *ἄβρωος* with the *χρύσεια κύλικες*. As Carson writes, gold cups are “not mortal tableware”¹⁵⁴ and *ἄβρωος* (*ἄβρωός*) is cognate with *ἀβροσύνη*, the lifestyle of luxury that Sappho so reveres. The final line of fragment 58, whether part of a separate performance tradition or not, reads *ἔγω δὲ φίλημα’ ἀβροσύναν*, “but I love luxury” (fr. 58). Kurke declares this Sappho’s “programmatic political statement [which means] I align myself with an aristocratic elite that has strong ties with the East.”¹⁵⁵ Sappho’s use of *φίλημα’*, roughly translated as ‘I love’ but with connotations of ‘I welcome’ and ‘I identify with’ in the intricate styles of Greek love, suggests that Sappho is deeply enthralled by the allure of luxury. Even the apple trees “represent abundance, wealth and

¹⁵² Worman, “Stylistic Landscapes,” 399.

¹⁵³ Note that I am hoping for my previous chapter to have explained ‘Sappho’s aesthetics’ vis-à-vis her language regarding adornment as upholding the politics and economics of the Lesbian aristocracy (see, L. Kurke ‘The Politics of *ἀβροσύνη* in Archaic Greece’ (1992).)

¹⁵⁴ Carson, *If Not, Winter*, 359.

¹⁵⁵ Kurke, “Politics of *ἀβροσύνη* in Archaic Greece,” 96.

the high position of their owners.”¹⁵⁶ The golden cups, too, are items of luxury and expense, and still included in her poems detailing natural wonders.

Sappho calls the grove *χάριεν* – a word she commonly uses to refer to lovely and beautiful objects. The phrase ‘*χάριεν ἄλλος*’ is what Treu calls “eine sapphische, vollig unhomerische Wortverbindung,”¹⁵⁷ meaning that this is a specifically Sapphic locale where ‘beauty’ (that is, Sappho’s idea of beauty) presides. This is Sappho’s world of beauty – the figurative backdrop to the rest of her poems of adornment and young women. This poem does not only include the presence of nature – Sappho includes cultivated human presence and worship with the presence of altars, horse grazing, and golden cups. It is clear that this place is significant because Sappho is dedicated to describing its particulars, both banal and unusual, in minute detail. Sappho uses the instrumental dative frequently in this poem, as the altars billow with smoking frankincense, the place is shadowed by roses, the meadow covered with flowers, and the nectar stirs with festivities. Nature acts instrumentally alongside the more ‘cultivated’ frankincense (which must be tapped). These ‘civilized’ aspects of humanity are also indicative of Sappho fashioning the grove for Aphrodite specifically.¹⁵⁸ The poet reminds the audience that she has constructed this space for divinity, complete with a temple and altars.

Χάριεν also refers to the reciprocity of *χάρις*. Sappho hosts the poetic grove full of symbols of Aphrodite and beckons her to come. Aphrodite, in order to reciprocate

¹⁵⁶ Heikkilä, “Sappho Fragment Two L.-P.,” 48.

¹⁵⁷ Max Treu, *Von Homer zur Lyrik*, Wandlungen des griechischen Weltbildes im Spiegel der Sprache, Munich (1955) [Zetemata 12], 212.

¹⁵⁸ Very literally, donning garments upon statues of the divine was common practice in Greek rituals. If this song was cultic in nature, perhaps there would have been a similar rite performed while singing.

graciously, must come and bring nectar to thank her petitioner. Sappho wants to be praised for being such a good devotee of the goddess. She calls the goddess into an imagined grove that she believes will impress her. They will eat and drink together and fall into pleasant Homeric laughter.

(vi) Paradise

The supernatural quality of this the surreal synaesthetic world has literary roots in descriptions of paradise. This poem depicts Sappho's vision of paradise and tranquility. Turyn writes that the grove "is pictured in the conventional colors of the ancient Greek paradise."¹⁵⁹ Indeed, McEvilley also comments upon this, "As so often in early Greek poetry (and in particular in Sappho) we find that ritual, paradisial, and festal imageries overlap."¹⁶⁰ The call to Aphrodite is not grounded in a simple woodland orchard but it is couched in metaphorical imagery of the goddess, in a location known for its liminality. The tranquility of this paradise stands in stark contrast to the common themes in Sappho's poetry about the tension of desire. *Eros*, in Carson's conception, is a state of "'want,' 'lack,' 'desire for that which is missing.' The lover wants what he does not have."¹⁶¹ This poem does not have the desperate ache for 'love' or another person's requited love. There are no lovers caressing beside the stream. The only presence other than beautiful nature and cultivated elements is Sappho's voice calling to the goddess. The grove appears as a natural world refined to perfection, outside of the realities of time and space. It exists beyond the lack entailed by *eros*. Instead, it is an exaggerated depiction of a state of fullness. This poem stands out in Sappho's oeuvre as being

¹⁵⁹ Turyn, "The Sapphic Ostrakon," 312.

¹⁶⁰ McEvilley, "Sappho, Fragment Two," 330.

¹⁶¹ Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 10.

relatively unmarred by the terror wrought by *eros*. For example, fragment 1 has a reference to the unfortunate tale of Helen, as well as a request for retribution in the face of romantic rejection. Fragment 44 is an extended jubilant image of Hektor and Andromache's wedding, which one cannot read without remembering the violent deaths they will face. Fragment 31 is a litany of illnesses in the face of, again, romantic rejection. By contrast, the fullness of fragment 2 leaves no room for lacking or wanting.

The *topos* of the *locus amoenus* also has its roots in paradise: "The pattern at large [of the ideal landscape] derives its mythic quality from the fact that it is typically associated with...settings which are supernatural in terms of time or place, and associated in some way with divine presence: the Golden Age; the Elysian Fields; Mount Helicon."¹⁶²

Indeed, remote landscapes, particularly those in which divine epiphanies occur, "[retain] the ambivalent candour of the Hesiodic golden age, the nostalgic ingenuousness of a Paradise lost."¹⁶³ Turyn is convinced that the grove is a display of Sappho's visualization of paradise and also sees hints of a Sapphic eschatology.¹⁶⁴ He writes, "Sappho simply transferred the picture of paradisiacal landscape, known from Orphic poetry, from the paradise to the holy precinct of Aphrodite."¹⁶⁵ Sappho envisions herself amongst the heroes of the Golden Age, able to walk and dine alongside the divine. The lack of violence, so entrenched in the myths related to landscape and the *locus amoenus*, perhaps suggests that Sappho has created a Paradise, Regained.

¹⁶² Hinds, "Landscape with Figures," 124.

¹⁶³ Petridou, *Divine Epiphany*, 198.

¹⁶⁴ For a detailed analysis of Orphic-Pythagorean symbols in this poem and comparison to the Elysiums of Vergil and Pindar, see Turyn, "The Sapphic Ostrakon," 313-316.

¹⁶⁵ Turyn, "The Sapphic Ostrakon," 316.

(vii) Aphrodite and ritual

The grove is replete with symbols of Aphrodite, but this creates a tension between typical motifs of desire and the lack of lovers in the poem's frame. Further problematizing this friction is the question of how Aphrodite can be said to be in this place if she is being called to it.

Sappho not only localizes the poem in an ἄλσος, but her meticulous focus upon the grove also characterizes the spot. Burnett explains the grove as more than a simple *setting* of the poem by likening it to an "Archimboldo portrait in which the goddess's best known attributes and parts are rendered by bits of landscape"¹⁶⁶ and Giesecke claims that the "garden that embodies the fertile, life-sustaining essence of Aphrodite."¹⁶⁷ These symbols associated with Aphrodite include particularly the flowers (roses especially), apples, the reference to horses, perfume, sleep, and the garden itself, among others.¹⁶⁸ McEvelley notes that horses do not necessarily exist in the grove, but that Sappho merely hints that the meadow is for horse-grazing: "ἰππόβοτος merely indicates what is potential, and perhaps only a mood: the horse is a symbol of sexuality elsewhere also associated with Aphrodite."¹⁶⁹ Sappho calls Aphrodite by her toponymic epithet *Cypris*. While not an uncommon diction choice by any means, Bremer notes that "An ancient Greek who was formulating a prayer *casu quo* a hymn searched for the names and titles that were appropriate to the occasion."¹⁷⁰ Thus, the toponymic further emphasizes Sappho's interest in highlighting place and location as critical to this poem. Scholars dispute the meaning

¹⁶⁶ Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, 262.

¹⁶⁷ Giesecke, *The Epic City*, 53.

¹⁶⁸ Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, 263 and n89. Some of these symbols, particularly the apples, are problematized by their associations to both virginity and its loss (see Burnett, 267).

¹⁶⁹ McEvelley, "Sappho, Fragment Two," 332n27.

¹⁷⁰ Bremer, "Greek Hymns," 195.

of Crete.¹⁷¹ For Turyn, the shrine is *on* Crete (his text proposes μοι Κρήτας in line 1) and he notes that Sappho may have “stopped in Crete” on her flight from Lesbos, where Aphrodite was worshipped as Ἄνθεια.¹⁷² Since Page’s edition, ἐκ Κρήτας has generally been preferred,¹⁷³ although there are other variations (Burnett supplies δεῦρ’ ἄμμε κρήτεσιπ[.] and translates this as “if to Cretans you came” suggesting an epiphany occurring in Crete).¹⁷⁴ McEvelley minimizes Crete’s importance as simply an association “with the cult of Aphrodite, and that is as far as we can go with it.”¹⁷⁵ Alongside the various other signs of Aphrodite, the Cretan connection is one of many. Carson discusses the poem as a cletic hymn, especially with regard to its inaugurating adverb δεῦρ’, which is sometimes paired with a verb and standard to the cletic genre. Carson pairs this adverb with the imperative in the final line of the poem, οἰνοχόαισον, and reads the poetry in between as a grammatical symbol mirroring the poem’s *attente de Dieu* theme. Carson describes the cletic hymn as “a calling hymn, an invocation to the god to come from where she is to where we are. ... Inherent in the rationale of a cletic hymn, then, is an emptiness or distance that it is the function of the hymn to mark by an act of attention.”¹⁷⁶ This raises the question of how this grove, so full of the imagery of sexuality, can be ‘Aphrodite’s’ grove, if she is not present. It seems more reasonable that

¹⁷¹ Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, lays out a useful analysis of the scholarship at 262n87, and Heikillä, “Sappho,” also analyzes the discussions regarding the first line at 41n7.

¹⁷² Turyn, “The Sapphic Ostrakon,” 312.

¹⁷³ McEvelley, “Sappho, Fragment Two,” 327.

¹⁷⁴ Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, 259.

¹⁷⁵ McEvelley, “Sappho, Fragment Two,” 328.

¹⁷⁶ Carson, *If Not, Winter*, 359.

this is Sappho's poetically imagined grove made explicitly for Aphrodite.¹⁷⁷ Carson writes,

“Sappho suspends attention between adverb at the beginning and verb at the end: the effect is uncanny – as if creation could be seen waiting for an event that is already perpetually here. There is no clear boundary between far and near; there is no climactic moment of god's arrival. Sappho renders a set of conditions that at the beginning depend on Aphrodite's absence but by the end include her presence – impossible drop that saturates the world.”¹⁷⁸

The final legible word of the poem οἰνοχόαισος is in the imperative.¹⁷⁹ The grove is created betwixt this invocation—almost as if it is subordinated as the ‘scenic backdrop’ role which landscape generally plays. Once again, we see Sappho shift literary convention for her art; the poem continually points out its unconventionality. The landscape is the lens through which we can see the context of Sappho's desire for communion with the divine: luxurious sensuality. Sappho seems to be invoking Aphrodite in what Bremer formalizes as the *da quia dedi* variant of cletic hymn.¹⁸⁰ That is, although Sappho does not formally iterate this, the extensive description of the grove is perhaps a poetic version of Sappho giving Aphrodite safe haven.

The call for epiphany here is pronounced; however, Aphrodite herself does not actually appear in the poem as she does in fragment 1. The remote, natural setting suggests that this hoped-for epiphany takes place “*in remotis*” as Petridou explains,

“Beautiful poetic narratives about the long vanished proximity between mortals and immortals (the golden age, where gods used to walk, interact freely, and even dine

¹⁷⁷ Sappho's fragment 1 is the classical example of a cletic hymn; for a short analysis see Boychenko, “Sappho or Alcaeus,” 247-250.

¹⁷⁸ Carson, *If Not, Winter*, 359.

¹⁷⁹ As a point of grammar, there is basis for δεῦρο to stand alone as an exhortatory adverb. Heikkilä, “Sappho Fragment 2, L.-P.,” writes that “The wish that the deity would appear is expressed by δεῦρο without the verb.” (41). Autenrieth also notes that it can be used without a verb in an exhortatory fashion (s.v. “δεῦρο.”).

¹⁸⁰ Bremer, “Greek Hymns,” 196.

with the men) functioned as a constant reminder of that ‘Paradise lost’. In an analogous fashion, the poet is also the closest a man can be to being a god. In the poet’s universe this kind of long-lost proximity is recreated; it is their poetic language that makes the divine visible, audible, and even tangible both for their synchronic and diachronic audience.”¹⁸¹

Essentially, it is a frequent trope of divine epiphany *in remotis* (liminal natural settings that incorporate great natural beauty and wild unknown dangers) that men are transformed into poets through divine inspiration, and even granted poetic immortality.¹⁸² In calling Aphrodite to this grove, Sappho connects the divine, mortal, and natural realms in a place of beauty.

Aphrodite can be present in the grove through Sappho’s desire for the goddess. The poet, by summoning Aphrodite, “makes present the absent object of desire, but is also the mechanism through which the erotic subject constitutes itself.”¹⁸³ The poet as suppliant constructs the grove in the image of Aphrodite and calls the goddess to it in order to show devotion – as well as to elevate her own status as poet-immortal. In return, she asks for nectar and festivities, poured out. This is a relatively unusual request that bears analysis. To begin with, this kind of assembly between mortals and immortals is similar to *theoxenia* festivals in which mortals showcase their devotion to the divine through hospitality (*xenia*). Thus, Sappho’s request to *pour* and the nectar and golden cups may hint at such a festival (perhaps it is to this that the *θαλίαι* refer). However, *theoxenic* festivals were a historical rite in which the entertainment and food (meat, vegetables, and cakes, for example) were supplied by mortals.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, there is a later precedent in the

¹⁸¹ Petridou, *Divine Epiphany*, 228.

¹⁸² Petridou, *Divine Epiphany*, 222-24.

¹⁸³ Greene, “Apostrophe and Women’s Erotics in the Poetry of Sappho,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association (1974-2014)* 124 (1994): 44.

¹⁸⁴ Petridou, *Divine Epiphany*, 291-92.

Delphic *Theoxenia* festival in which “Apollo was thought to offer hospitality to gods and heroes, among whom Pindar, the *theophilēs* poet, was thought to dine along with the god in his temple.”¹⁸⁵ This was supposedly intended to show “the poet’s exclusive privilege to enjoy the god’s company.”¹⁸⁶ Similarly, Sappho seems to offer Aphrodite poetic entertainment, and seeks this privilege in return.

(viii) Nectar and festivities

The role of nectar, the unearthly drink of the divine, plays an important role in Sappho’s prayer. Nectar and ambrosia appear throughout Greek literature as the food of the gods, “for humans always untasted.”¹⁸⁷ It does not seem entirely straightforward to mix nectar with ‘festivities’ which are an event and are not typically ‘mixed’ with an actual liquid substance used for drinking. This might be synecdoche, where festivities are supposed to represent the convivial and jubilant celebratory feeling garnered by participants through festive occasions. Alternatively, it is some kind of ritual motion whereby an oil standing in for divine nectar is poured out at a festivity – the meaning of this blending must be elucidated further. Worman briefly suggests there are “girls’ festivities”¹⁸⁸ at play; however, we have already seen that the grove does not incorporate a group of young women. *Θαλία* in the singular can mean “abundance” which is slightly more sensible to mix with nectar, but it is the plural *θαλίαι* inscribed upon the ostracon. In the plural,

¹⁸⁵ Petridou, *Divine Epiphany*, 290.

¹⁸⁶ Athanassaki, L., “Apollo and His Oracle in Pindar’s Epinicians: Poetic Representations, Politics, and Ideology,” in *Apolline Politics and Poetics*, eds. L. Athanassaki, R. P. Martin, and J. F. Miller (2009), 405.

¹⁸⁷ Butler and Purves, “Introduction,” 5. There is some evidence, however, of prized humans and heroes who are allowed to consume (before, we saw tradition give Pindar a taste of nectar); see *Iliad* 19.38-39, Thetis gives Patroclus nectar and ambrosia to preserve his body from pests, and at 19.352-354, Athena gives Achilles nectar and ambrosia to stave off hunger. Pindar’s *First Olympian* shows us gods serving nectar to Tantalus; this nectar bestows upon him the gift of immortality (νέκταρ ἀμβροσίαν τε / δῶκεν, οἷσιν ἄφθιτον / θέν νιν.)

¹⁸⁸ Worman, “Stylistic Landscapes,” 401.

‘festivities’ is the definition according to the LSJ, the Brill lexicon suggests ‘festival, party, or banquet’; the lexicon to Pindar notes the possibility of Thalia, or Festivity, one of the Graces.¹⁸⁹

It is still unclear how one could mix a physical substance with the abstract noun that is ‘abundance’ or ‘good cheer’. Burnett describes the progress of the poem’s imagery from the “substantial” golden cups, to the “mortal but insubstantial festivity,” and the “immortal and ideal” nectar so that “so that the finite gives way progressively to the infinite as this longed-for miracle is described.”¹⁹⁰ Burnett correctly ascertains the blending of “insubstantial festivity” with “ideal liquid” but this analysis does not clearly say what the significance of the infinite is nor why this is apparently a “longed-for miracle.” Turyn suggests that “the nectar mentioned in v. 17 may be understood also metaphorically as poetical inspiration.”¹⁹¹ It would make sense that Aphrodite could bring poetical inspiration to Sappho, as is common in epiphany *in remotis* but Sappho seems to create poetry in conjunction with Aphrodite,¹⁹² rather than relaying the goddess’ voice. Nectar might more directly refer to poetic immortality – for this is what Sappho seeks in various other poems: poetic remembrance.¹⁹³ As Carson writes, that nectar is not “a beverage normally enjoyed by any but gods.”¹⁹⁴ Thus, we see an Aphrodite who mixes divine nectar and pours the drink for her suppliants in sumptuous golden goblets. In this

¹⁸⁹ Slater’s *Lexicon to Pindar*, s.v. “Θαλία.” Thalia also has associations with Aphrodite, and Sappho’s poems occasionally feature the Charites.

¹⁹⁰ Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, 275.

¹⁹¹ Turyn, “The Sapphic Ostrakon,” 312.

¹⁹² See their conversation together in fragment 1.

¹⁹³ To be discussed in the following chapter, see fragments 94 and 96, along with fragment 55.

¹⁹⁴ Carson, *If Not, Winter*, 359.

dreamworld, Sappho imagines a reality where the gods attend on her. Treu exclaims, “Welch einsigartiger Ausdruck!”¹⁹⁵

(ix) The coma

Sappho does not explicitly link the nectar with the magical κῶμα that drips from leaves. But since the nectar is the sought-after immortality for which Sappho beseeches Aphrodite, it is also an unusual, inexplicitly magical feature of the grove. The κῶμα is a trance-like slumber that, as Francesca D’Alfonso writes, “gli elementi più connotanti e ricorrenti di questa particolare condizione sono lo provenienza divina, l’inesorabilità del suo insorgere, l’ambiguità dei suoi effetti.”¹⁹⁶ The κῶμα of fragment 2 does not originate from Aphrodite, though the ambiguity of its effect is pronounced.¹⁹⁷ Burnett explains that the κῶμα “confirms the supernatural and amorous suggestions of the place, for coma is induced either by a god or else by magic, and it usually stuns its subject with a pleasure that has an erotic aspect.”¹⁹⁸ This magical trance has antagonistic attributes as well,¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Treu, *Von Homer zur Lyrik*, 211.

¹⁹⁶ Francesca D’Alfonso, “κῶμα degli dèi e degli uomini,” in *Museum Helveticum : schweizerische Zeitschrift für klassische Altertumswissenschaft = Revue suisse pour l’étude de l’antiquité classique = Rivista svizzera di filologia classica*, 69 (2012): 62.

¹⁹⁷ With regard to the *vexata quaestio* that is the related verb, D’Alfonso gives as κατάρπει (following the emendation of Risch) and translates to the Italian affera. She prefers ‘grab’ as a verb for papyrological reasons as well as to concord with sleep grabbing the eyes in both Homer’s *Iliad* (23.62) and *Odyssey* (20.56) (D’Alfonso 65). Burnett discusses the papyrology of κατέρπει as non-Lesbian dialect and other possibilities for this word, explaining that κατάρπει has Sapphic grounding, although it is not intransitive as it would be in this poem (Burnett 271n1 13). κατέρπει has a precedent in Erinna (Treu, *Von Homer zur Lyrik*, 211n1). Turyn, “The Sapphic Ostrakon,” supplies κατ’ ἴρον instead and offers the translation as “the sleepy quiet of the quivering leaves reigns over the holy place,” 310.

¹⁹⁸ Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, 271.

¹⁹⁹ D’Alfonso, “κῶμα degli dèi e degli uomini,” writes “il sonno letargico (~ κῶμα) è uno strumento che gli dèi utilizzano contro antagonisti divini o semidivine.” (52). Further, Heikkilä, “Sappho Fragment 2, L.-P.,” suggests that Sappho asks for Aphrodite’s nectar “to ward off the possible bad effects of κῶμα” (52). The idea of κῶμα in a *locus amoenus* setting is certainly something to be wary of, but it does not seem likely that Sappho has this hypothetical in mind.

though it is unlikely that Sappho intends to use the imagery for such purposes. The κῶμα not a threat, but a pleasant dream-like state of revelling in her poetry.

The enchantment provided by the κῶμα of the grove is like that of the beautiful poetic experience the song of the grove effects upon the audience. D'Alfonso illustrates the effect of the κῶμα as a parallel to that of the grove: "Allo stesso modo, nel boschetto sacro in cui Saffo attende l'epifania di Afrodite (fr. 2 V.), il koma che pervade gli astanti esprime l'incantamento che nasce dal carattere numinoso del luogo."²⁰⁰ The 'carattere numinoso del luogo' is created by Sappho's poetic power; her creativity and imagination have the ability to entrance (she hopes) even a goddess. Indeed, the numinous presence of her poetic art imbues this poem, otherwise devoid of human presence, with the movement, action, and wonder human creativity provides. Burnett writes that "Coma is what the goddess (if she comes) will find; nectar is what she will bring."²⁰¹ Burnett is correct that the poet wants this place to offer κῶμα to the goddess, but it is not "the lifelessness that her grove has induced"²⁰² through sexual satisfaction, but the reverie induced by poetic creation.

Sappho seeks a reaction of awe from Aphrodite, just as Hermes stood transfixed, in the *Iliad*, marvelling at the landscape of Ogygia.²⁰³ Sappho wants Aphrodite to admire this poetic grove, and thereby 'praise' Sappho's creative power. Landscape scenes tend to follow a typical pattern, ending with the viewer's reaction, which "involves some form of awe and/or pleasure and often it includes urges toward emulation, mimetic gestures that

²⁰⁰ D'Alfonso, "κῶμα degli dèi e degli uomini," 65

²⁰¹ Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, 274.

²⁰² Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets*, 275.

²⁰³ For a treatment of this scene at *Iliad* 5.50-75, see Bonnechere, "The Place of the Sacred Grove," 41.

poets and prose writers reinscribe in the telling.”²⁰⁴ The character’s reaction, what Worman calls “appreciative gazing”, thus “models for its audience this very appreciation.”²⁰⁵ Awe and pleasure are the reaction the poet expects and desires from Aphrodite. Those who experienced epiphanies were “privileged individuals, by having been granted moments of extreme proximity with the divine, were raised above their fellow humans”²⁰⁶ Sappho claims this privilege for herself in her poetry.

The grove of fragment 2 is hermetic and layered with symbolism. Full of synaesthesia and blossoming nature, the poem is precariously balanced between the natural, human, and divine realms. While the landscape is described in great detail, Sappho ornaments natural reality with synaesthetic textures connoting otherworldliness and adds cultic symbols to show her refinement of the wild environment. Sappho’s love of luxury means that even the natural world characterizes her sumptuous ethics. Moreover, her language of beauty constructs a paradisiac world of tranquility. This world of beauty mixes the divine, mortal, and natural realms together in poetry that is to induce a κῶμα-like trance in her listeners. The poet’s use of sublime landscape is also an indication of the expected reaction to beauty. Sappho’s natural world is one that connects the human and divine realms in its beauty.

²⁰⁴ Worman, “Stylistic Landscapes,” 399.

²⁰⁵ Worman, “Stylistic Landscapes,” 399.

²⁰⁶ Petridou, *Divine Epiphany*, 228.

Chapter 4. Memory

One of the main tensions in Sappho's aesthetic theory, wherein beauty is an ethical virtue, is the relationship between beauty and time. Is beauty a brief fluctuation indicating the world's ephemerality, or does Sappho hint at the unchanging and eternal nature that Plato sees in 'beauty'? If beauty is lost as youth passes, does one's virtue fade too? Burnett's understanding of Sappho's love cult of girls and beauty sees ritual as lending permanence to the individual episode, "for no single act can be rendered futile by completion since the cult will continue forever."²⁰⁷ Any single act of beautification can represent the generations of women before and after who have engaged in these rituals. But change is also an inevitability, as girls marry, grow into women, and leave.

There is danger in reading Plato too far into Sappho's poetry. Greene writes that "Sappho's association of love with beauty and moral excellence may also be said to anticipate Plato, for whom beauty and goodness are inextricably connected."²⁰⁸ However, Sappho's equivalence of beauty and goodness is borne out of a general Greek sensibility, and if her association anticipates Plato, then so should Homer's. But perhaps Sappho's formulations of this association helped establish the nascent foundations of abstract beauty. It will be necessary then to delineate these two 'beauties', the sensible beauty of the physical world in flux and the abstracted form that can be spoken of generally. This is a separate discussion than the difference between subjective and objective beauty, which is the concern of fragment 16 and the *κόλλιστον*. Nonetheless, these are similar conversations which draw upon each other. For instance, sensible beauty can be said to

²⁰⁷ Burnett, "Desire and Memory," 26.

²⁰⁸ Greene, "Sappho 58," online edition at <https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/3409>.

be objective or subjective, as can its abstract idea. Sappho is not explicit in asking these questions; she is a poet, not a philosopher, though her work can be viewed philosophically. Her poetry articulates such ideas, for example, in her themes of remembrance. The poems ask who will be remembered, for what reasons, and how can we remember inevitably fading beauty?

(i) Youth and beauty

This tension between the eternality and ephemerality of beauty is most prominent in Sappho's fear of aging. 'The beautiful' is a necessarily ephemeral, perishable concept. The fear of aging corresponds to the fear of the loss of desire and the possibility of being forgotten. Beauty, in Sappho, is a physical manifestation of love, and of being loved. For Sappho, the last attempt at clutching 'the beautiful' in her old age is in the tradition of music and poetry. And indeed, even these beauties are perishable – the fragmented existence of her poetry is proof.

Scholars have examined the flower as the symbol *par excellence* that unlocks this tension. The flower, for McEvelley, signifies "beauty in its freshness, its immense and terrible delicacy, its perishability, which the image suggests – that brief moment when the beautiful shines out brilliantly and assumes, for all its perishability, the stature of an eternal condition in the spirit if not in the body."²⁰⁹ McEvelley draws out the delicacy of beauty and its ephemerality; flowers are "symbolically associated with girls [...] their perishability and their beauty which looks as if it could never perish binds them together."²¹⁰ In Barbara Hughes Fowler's discussion of flowers as imagery of the archaic

²⁰⁹ McEvelley, "Sapphic Imagery," 269.

²¹⁰ McEvelley, "Sapphic Imagery," 266.

aesthetic, she notes that they “appear for their own sake [...] often in romantic or erotic contexts, but often to suggest texture as well as to state fact, to create atmosphere.”²¹¹ She explains that the description of the shrine of Aphrodite (“shadowed with roses”) imbues the scene with “tokens of love” as “an important part of the archaic aesthetic.”²¹² I want to suggest that these images are not created for their own sake, but to further her themes of memory of love, especially as it relates to beauty.

Garlands are instruments of memory, either as a remembered object, or a μνήμα, a memento that recalls the past. Sappho’s fragment 125 says simply, “Once I wove garlands” (αυταόρα ἐστεφαναπλόκην). The scholiast on Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae* writes, “Garland-weaving was of youth and lovers, vis-à-vis the custom that our fore-mothers used to weave garlands.”²¹³ The repeated references to garlands and flowers throughout Sappho’s corpus speaks to the priority Sappho gives to the interrelation of youth, beauty, and desire. Sappho’s formulation that the youthful are beautiful and the beautiful are desired is broken with time and age. Just as fresh flowers eventually wilt and rot, a woman ages and becomes undesired. However, in a moment of celebratory ritual, of happy youth and beauty, in the moment a song is sung, the moment and the song freeze in a memory of the past. The ephemeral moment is ritually repeated and, therefore, remembered eternally (or as long as tradition lasts), as flowers will bloom each spring. Page duBois writes on this fragment: “The words in Greek twine around each other, adjective modifying noun in such a way as to imitate the braiding of flowers, words plaited and wound together, creating a poem that is itself a garland, a crown for the

²¹¹ Fowler, “The Archaic Aesthetic,” 140.

²¹² Fowler, “The Archaic Aesthetic,” 141.

²¹³ Sappho, Alcaeus, *Greek Lyric, Volume I*, ed. Campbell, 145.

recipient, for the reader.”²¹⁴ It is as if the memory of the girl is bound up and transported through the wreaths of flowers.

In archaic poetry, physical beauty is by nature tied to youth. Aging bodies were not symbols of grace or handsomeness. Sappho maligns this fact repeatedly, for example, in fragment 121:

ἀλλ’ ἔων φίλος ἄμμι
λέχος ἄρνυσο νεώτερον·
οὐ γὰρ τλάσομ’ ἔγω συνοί-
κην ἔοισα γεραιτέρα

but though you are my beloved,
strive for a younger bed;
for I will not suffer to live
with you, when I am older

(Fr. 121)

The poet is despondent that she is the older individual in a relationship and encourages her partner to find someone younger. The dichotomy of young/old and desire/distaste is almost clean-cut, though Sappho is notably subjective in her belief: she decides that she (emphasized with ἔγω) will not τλάσομ’ to be the older partner; the verb denotes “undergo[ing] hardship, disgrace.”²¹⁵ For Sappho, the poet, does not wish to be in a relationship, as indicated by συνοίκην or cohabitation, when (in her belief) her age, in relation to a younger male (φίλος is masculine), means that she would feel shame at living with a younger partner. Since Sappho generally prizes youthfulness, she rejects love based on her own pessimistic perception of her own age.

²¹⁴ Page duBois, *Sappho is Burning*, 178.

²¹⁵ *LSJ*, s.v. “τλάω.”

Sappho's vocabulary for youth is standard, but she frequently modifies it with her favoured adjectives of beauty and desire. She says in fragment 132, "I have a beautiful girl, resembling golden flowers," (ἔστι μοι κάλα πάις χρυσοίοισιν ἀνθέμοισιν / ἐμφέρη, 132.1-2). The youth of her child is compared to that of flowers. She refers to a charming child (ἰμε[ρόεντα παῖδα, 17.10) and good and beautiful maiden(s) (ἄγνα καὶ κα[λα / παρθ[εν, 17.13-14). The *epaulia* of fragments 107 and 114 are hugely important for understanding Sappho's remembrance of youth.

παρθενία, παρθενία, ποῖ με λίποις' ἀποίχη;
 † οὐκέτι ἦξω πρὸς σέ, οὐκέτι ἦξω †.

Maidenhood, maidenhood, where have you gone, abandoning me?
 Never again shall I return to you: never again shall I return.
 (Fr. 114)

The word παρθενία is frequently translated as 'virginity'; used by both Campbell and Carson.²¹⁶ 'Maidenhood' or 'girlhood' would be more appropriate, as Sappho is recollecting her youth before marriage generally. Demetrius, in *On Style*, suggested in this poem "a bride addresses her παρθενίαν, and her παρθενίαν replies to her using the same figure."²¹⁷ Campbell translates this as virginity, but it makes as much sense that it is her personified youth responding to her, rather than a state of non-sexual experience.

ἦρ' ἔτι παρθενίας ἐπιβάλλομαι
 Do I still eagerly seek my maidenhood?
 (Fr. 107)

ἦρ expresses uncertainty and nervousness; perhaps this is a bride on the eve of her wedding. Avagianou cites both of these fragments as evidence for the *epaulia* rite in Greek wedding rituals which were the "ceremonies performed on the day after the

²¹⁶ See Sappho, Alcaeus, *Greek Lyric, Volume I*, ed. Campbell, 139 and Carson, *If Not, Winter*, 233.

²¹⁷ Sappho, Alcaeus, *Greek Lyric, Volume I*, ed. Campbell, 139.

wedding.”²¹⁸ Songs would be sung during the *epaulia*, “where the emphasis lies on the transition of the bride to her new status.”²¹⁹ The bride transitions, through the rituals of marriage, to a new life stage.²²⁰ The newly married bride is as distant from her *παρθενία* as she will ever be; she memorializes the state that will never return to her. Sappho thus romanticizes and has nostalgia for her lost youth.

The new Sappho fragment prominently features the struggles of aging, and the first extant use of the substantive τὸ κάλον as an abstract concept:²²¹

ὑμμες πεδὰ Μοίσαν ἰ]οκ[ό]λπων κάλα δῶρα, παῖδες,
 σπουδάσδετε καὶ τὰ]ν φιλάοιδον λιγύραν χελύνναν·
 ἔμοι δ' ἄπαλον πρίν] ποτ' [ἔ]οντα χροά γῆρας ἤδη
 ἐπέλλαβε, λεῦκαι δ' ἐγ]έροντο τρίχες ἐκ μελαίναν·
 βάρυς δέ μ' ὁ [θ]ῦμος πεπόηται, γόνα δ' [ο]ὐ φέροισι,
 τὰ δὴ ποτα λαίψηρ' ἔον ὄρχησθ' ἴσα νεβρίοισι.
 τὰ <μὲν> στεναχίσδω θαμέως· ἀλλὰ τί κεν ποεῖην;
 ἀγήραον ἄνθρωπον ἔοντ' οὐ δύνατον γένεσθαι.
 καὶ γάρ π[ο]τα Τίθωνον ἔφαντο βροδόπαχυν Αὔων
 ἔρω φ. . αθρῖσαν βάμεν' εἰς ἔσχατα γᾶς φέροισα]ν,
 ἔοντα [κ]άλον καὶ νέον, ἀλλ' αὐτον ὕμως ἔμαρψε
 χρόνω πόλιον γῆρας, ἔχ[ο]ντ' ἀθανάταν ἄκοιτιν.
]μέναν νομίσδει
]αις ὀπάσδοι
 ἔγω δὲ φίλημμ' ἀβροσύναν,]τοῦτο καὶ μοι
 τὸ λά[μπρον ἔρος τῶελίω καὶ τὸ κά]λον λέ[λ]ογχε.

You, make haste for the lovely gifts, children,
 and the clear, song-loving lyre of the violet-lapped Muses,
 My skin, soft before, old age now took from me,
 my hair turned white from black.
 My spirit has made itself heavy, my knees don't hold me,
 which once danced swiftly like little fawns.
 I rue this frequently, but what can I do?
 it is not possible, being human, to be ageless

²¹⁸ Avagianou, *Sacred Marriage*, 15 and n80.

²¹⁹ Avagianou, *Sacred Marriage*, 15.

²²⁰ See Deborah Kamen, “The Life Cycle in Archaic Greece,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Archaic Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 96-101 for a discussion of marriage in archaic Greece, and Avagianou, *Sacred Marriage*, 1-18 for specific marriage rites.

²²¹ Riegel, “Beauty, TO ΚΑΛΟΝ, and its Relation to the Good,” 64.

For even rose-armed Dawn, they used to say, bearing Tithonus once
 with love, walked to the limits of the earth
 when he was beautiful and young, but still grey old age
 seized him by force of time, although an immortal was his wife

...she thinks

...I give with

but I love luxury, and this to me
 Eros has granted: the brightness of the sun and beauty.

(Fr. 58)

Greene writes that fragment 58 “clearly presents change as fundamental to human nature” and further calls it a “*carpe diem* message” intended to convince younger generations to “engage in creative and joyous expression.”²²² The exemplum of the Tithonus myth is complex; the meaning bisects depending on whether or not the audience is supposed to read the ending of the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* intertextually alongside the reference. Without this reference, and especially without the last four lines which may belong to a separate but connected performance tradition, the narrative is of a woman mourning the loss of her youth and beauty, comparing her fate to that of Tithonus who was destined to decay ceaselessly with age, despite his immortal connections.

Indeed, Tithonus is used, in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, “as an example of something to be avoided – old age.”²²³ However, the Tithonus myth in the hymn ends with his transformation into a cicada, “an ideal image for the aged poetess herself, with her well-attested wish to have her poetry win her glory beyond the grave.”²²⁴ Thus Janko sees a consolatory aspect to the poem: “as youth gives way to age, love is transmuted into song.”²²⁵ Through her poeticizing of the loss of youth, she is able to convert this into the

²²² Greene, “Sappho 58,” online edition at <https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/3409>.

²²³ Janko, “Sappho Revisited,” 19.

²²⁴ Richard Janko, “Sappho Revisited,” (*Times Literary Supplement*, 2005): 19.

²²⁵ Janko, “Sappho Revisited,” 20.

beauty of song and lyric. Boedeker disagrees with Janko's intertextual reading, writing that it "assumes that the audience would draw on a particular extra-Sapphic variant of the story, which is attested only later, in which Tithonus becomes a cicada whose sound (unlike all the rest of him) does not fade away."²²⁶ She finds it "more likely that Tithonus is here meant to serve as the extreme case, proving that no human can escape old age."²²⁷ While the intertextuality is an interesting possibility, I find that Boedeker's conservative approach is more in-line with the preserved text. Sappho's interest in poetic immortality is elsewhere attested, but she usually states this desire explicitly rather than couching it in inference.

Sappho sees aging more positively than some of her peers, such as Solon and Theognis, though still recognizes its negative aspects.²²⁸ Boedeker, however, sees in these lines "a positive way to deal with the inevitability of aging,"²²⁹ and compares the fragment to the new Simonides poem:

νήπιοι, οἷς ταύτη κεῖται νόος, οὐτὲ ἴσασι
 ὡς χρόνος ἔστ' ἥβης καὶ βιότοι' ὀλίγος
 θνητοῖς. ἀλλὰ σὺ ταῦτα μαθὼν βιότου ποτὶ τέρμα
 ψυχῆι τῶν ἀγαθῶν τλήθι χαριζόμενος.

Fools are they whose thoughts are thus! Nor do they know
 that the time of youth and life is short
 for mortals. But you, learning this at the end of your life,
 endure, delighting in good things in your soul.

²²⁶ Deborah Boedeker, "No Way Out? Aging in the New (and Old) Sappho," online edition at <https://www.chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/6041.6>.

²²⁷ Boedeker, "No Way Out?" online edition at <https://www.chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/6041.6>.

²²⁸ For instance, Solon calls old age κακὸν γῆρας (1.24) and Theognis who sings rather glumly, ὃ μοι ἐγὼν ἥβης καὶ γήραος οὐλομένοιο, τοῦ μὲν ἐπερχομένου, τῆς δ' ἀπονισομένης. For a more complex view of Solon and aging, see Charles C. Chiasson, "The Herodotean Solon," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 27 (1986): 252-253.

²²⁹ Boedeker, "No Way Out?" online edition at <https://www.chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/6041.6>.

Simonides, fr. el. 20.9–12 (ed. and trans. Sider)²³⁰

Boedeker notes the interest Simonides and Sappho both take in the topic of old age but sees Sappho's poem as exhibiting a unique perspective: Sappho stresses the powerlessness (οὐ δύνατον) of humans in the face of aging. In response to this powerlessness ("the inevitability of growing old"), Boedeker sees either the "unflinching acceptance" of the first 12 lines, or the "god-blessed alleviation" of the last four.²³¹ I would argue that Sappho's tone in the Cologne fragment is not that of "unflinching acceptance" but of reluctant tolerance and distaste towards the aging process. Old age "took" or "seized" (ἐπιλαμβάνω) her previously soft skin; she claims that her θυμός has been weighed down, indicating a negative reflection on her state. She mourns the days of her nimble legs prancing like fawns. Boedeker suggests that the Cologne section, performed by itself, "would be deemed suitable for a short performance on the rather popular topic of old age, whereas [the last four lines] would be more appropriate for an occasion in which the focus is on divine benevolence."²³² That the two sections belong to two performance traditions is generally agreed upon.²³³ Greene's suggestion is more convincing that Dawn's labours in carrying Tithonus "to the ends of the earth may suggest the poet's own attempts to immortalize the beloved through verse" and further, that "the image of Dawn mobilized by love to traverse the vast spaces of the world may

²³⁰ David Sider, "As Is the Generation of Leaves in Homer, Simonides, Horace, and Stobaios," *Arethusa* 29 (Spring 1996): 263-264.

²³¹ Boedeker, "No Way Out?" online edition at <https://www.chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/6041.6>.

²³² Boedeker, "No Way Out?" online edition at <https://www.chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/6041.6>.

²³³ Anton Bierl, "Visualizing the Cologne Sappho: Mental Imagery through Choralities, the Sun, and Orpheus," in *The Look of Lyric: Greek Song and the Visual* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 310.

be linked with Sappho's own poetic voice, in particular the confidence she expresses in her eventual poetic immortality."²³⁴

It is significant that Simonides' rendering of the "good things" of human experience uses the word ἀγαθῶν, whereas Sappho, of course, uses ἀβροσύναν and τὸ κάλον. Sappho frequently uses words that connote visual beauty in her discussions of the good. These last four lines have garnered their fair share of discourse, debate, and confusion.

Campbell, writing before the Cologne papyrus was found, wonders if the end of the poem means "perhaps 'love has kept me alive'."²³⁵ West is troubled by this translation of ἔρος τῶελίω as "'love of the sun(light), that is, of life'"; he writes, "I confess I do not understand the logic" and wonders "if such a peculiar phrase could be used in Greek at all."²³⁶ He raises a pertinent question: "How would [a love of life] connect with the love of ἀβροσύνα?"²³⁷ I would suggest that for Sappho, *being alive* is delighting in beauty, luxury, and effervescent expense. Luxury pervades her work. For Sappho, the opulent and wonderful are ethical 'goods.' West does not agree that ἔρος τῶελίω could mean a woman "throw[ing] herself enthusiastically into wild social activity, adventurous sports, and so on"²³⁸ but these are just the κάλ' ἐπάσχομεν, the beautiful things Sappho and her circle are supposed to remember in fragment 94 (as I argue below).

In fragment 56, Sappho again poeticizes the chance of immortality:

οὐδ' ἴαν δοκίμωμι προσίδοισαν φάος ἀλίω
 ἔσσεσθαι σοφίαν πάρθενον εἰς οὐδένα πω χρόνον
 τεαύταν

²³⁴ Greene, "Sappho 58."

²³⁵ Sappho, Alcaeus, *Greek Lyric, Volume I*, ed. Campbell, 101.

²³⁶ West, "The New Sappho," 8.

²³⁷ West, "The New Sappho," 8.

²³⁸ West, "The New Sappho," 8.

I do not think any girl, looking upon the light of the sun,
will at any time have
such an art

(Fr. 56)

The σοφίαν is suggested by Campbell to be “poetic skill.”²³⁹ Although the context of this fragment is sorely missed, we may note that the reference to the φάος ἄλιω is similar to that of the τὸ λάμπρον τῶελίω καὶ τὸ κάλον in fragment 58. Sappho frequently uses cosmological imagery to express the superlative beauty of certain girls; however, this meaning does not explain why looking at the sun would never have such ‘poetic skill’ or artfulness. I suggest that cosmological imagery also refers to an eternal quality of timelessness: that it relates to future remembrance. Thus, the poet sings of Eros bringing her poetic immortality.

If beautiful women are unchanging for Sappho, what happens to these women when they age out of their beauty? Sappho refuses to compromise her view of the beautiful, even as she ages, recognizing the beautiful as beautiful in others.

ταῖς κάλαις ὕμιν <τὸ> νόημα τῶμον
οὐ διάμειπτον

for you beautiful women, my mind
does not vary
(Fr. 41)

Sappho laments the loss of her own beauty, while still recognizing that this powerlessness is a crucial facet of human (and even specifically feminine) reality. Instead, she finds solace in the recurring beauty of those around her.

²³⁹ Sappho, Alcaeus, *Greek Lyric, Volume I*, ed. Campbell, 99.

(ii) Remembering as loving

In Sappho's poetry, remembrance becomes a positive act of care and consideration for a loved one. McEvelley supplies the equations: 'to remember' = 'to love' and 'to forget' = 'not love.'²⁴⁰ The equations can be read into Sappho's corpus as whole as an interpretive aid. Taking them one step further, remembrance might also be seen as an act of love rather than as its equal. Remembrance is love enacted. In recollection through song, in "mak[ing] present the absent object of desire"²⁴¹ the desire becomes complete in the moment of remembrance. This formulation directly connects Sappho's consideration of memory to her consideration of love. Sappho frequently connects memory to beauty and adornment; memory and *eros* are further equated by taking beauty as their object. It is especially important because so often the object is the physical beauty and adornment of a girl.

Sappho stakes her confident claim most prominently in fragment 147, "someone, I say, will remember us, even another" (μνάσεσθαί τινά φαῖμι † καὶ ἕτερον † ἀμμέων). The supplied text, καὶ ἕτερον, is probably incorrect; ὕστερον may be more appropriate.

Campbell's translation "in the future" is somewhat awkward: the future tense of μνάσεσθαί already suggests the future. Carson's rendering of "even in another time"²⁴² is more poetic but takes liberties with the Greek. The idea of Sappho prophesying her own fame into future generations is tantalizing, but the poem's fragmentation makes for difficult comprehension. The use of ὕστερον would accord better with Carson's version. Either way, Sappho's steadfast belief that there will be someone who will, future tense,

²⁴⁰ McEvelley, "Sapphic Imagery," 261.

²⁴¹ Greene, "Apostrophe," 44.

²⁴² Carson, *If Not, Winter*, 297.

remember her and another is an important theme in her lyrics (and much of early Greek poetry). Indeed, it is reminiscent of the Homeric τις-speech of imagined future praise, “voiced by an anonymous *tis* or ‘someone’.”²⁴³ In Sappho, however, it is not an anonymized speaker but an unknown person who will remember, and a known speaker: the poet. She flips the prediction that *someone* will say, and instead confidently owns her belief of her own lasting fame. She speaks; someone else will remember.

The poet also prays for her remembrance, understanding (just as she is οὐ δύνατον and not immune to aging in fragment 58) that memory is not necessarily a certainty:

ὄνοιρε μελαινα[,
 φο[ο]ίταις ὄτα τ' ὕπνος[
 γλύκως θε[έ]ος, ἦ δεῖν' ὀνίας μ]
 ζά χωρίς ἔχην τάν δυναμ[
 ἔλπις δέ μ' ἔχει μὴ πεδέχη[ν
 μηδὲν μακάρων ἐλ[
 οὐ γάρ κ' ἔον οὕτω[.'
 ἀθύρματα κα . [
 γένοιτο δέ μοι[
 τοῖς πάντα[
 dark dream,
 you pace back and forth when sleep...
 sweet god, truly, terrible sorrow is mine
 through separately ... to hold power
 I do not hope to share anything...
 of the blessed gods
 for I would not be this way
 ornaments

²⁴³ John R. Wilson, “KAI KE TIS ΩΔ' EPEEI: An Homeric Device in Greek Literature,” *Illinois Classical Studies* 4 (1979): 1-2. Later, Theognis also uses the *tis*-speech “οὐδέ τις ἀλλάξει κάκιον τοῦσθλοῦ παρεόντος, / ὅδε δὲ πᾶς τις ἐρεῖ: ‘Θεὺγιιδός ἐστιν ἔπη” (fr. 22) c.f. Wilson p. 4, though Theognis’ version is much more Homeric than Sappho’s.

and may I have
all them

(Fr. 63)

The fragmentary remains of this poem make for a difficult translation. Sappho, in the penultimate line, switches to the optative and wishes for something. She may be wishing for the ἀθύρματα;²⁴⁴ or perhaps she prays for a share in the divine, an eternal memory. Perhaps she even wishes for both.

Sappho employs a simile of a sweetapple at the peak of its ripeness that remains unpicked but not forgotten:

οἶον τὸ γλυκύμαλον ἐρεύθεται ἄκρῳ ἐπ' ὕσδῳ,
ἄκρον ἐπ' ἀκροτάτῳ, λελάθοντο δὲ μαλοδρόπῃες·
οὐ μὰν ἐκλελάθοντ', ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐδύναντ' ἐπίκεσθαι.

Just as the sweetapple reddens at the top of a branch,
on the top of the top, the apple pickers have forgotten;
well, not entirely forgotten, but they are not able to reach it.

(Fr. 105A)

There is not a neat equivalency in this fragment between being beautiful and being remembered as there is between remembering and loving. The apple pickers have almost, but not entirely, forgotten this ‘apple’ of a girl, clearly analogizing the ripeness of the apple to the marriageable state of a girl. The poem possibly represents a sense of the Greek proverb *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλά* or ‘beautiful things are difficult’, in that the beautiful apple is difficult to pick (and perhaps even has the ethical implication that this difficult beauty is worth pursuing; however there is not enough text to support this). The duplicated verb *λανθάνω* *λελάθοντο* and *ἐκλελάθοντ'* emphasizes forgetting. Carson writes that this “self-correction emphasizes desire’s infinite deferral. Self-correction is

²⁴⁴ Notably followed by a fragmented *κα-*, which might possibly be the modifying adjective *κάλα*

also apparent in the Greek prosody of the poem.”²⁴⁵ In the rhythm of the poem “(dactyls slow to spondees) as the apple begins to look farther and farther away.”²⁴⁶ The memory, too, of the beautiful girl slips further and further into the past. The apple is nearly forgotten despite its beauty (I infer beauty from its state of ripeness). The beauty of the apple keeps it from being forgotten. The repetition, which Carson calls self-correction, seems to negate itself; the apple is *not* forgotten, but since it is unreachable it is forlornly left behind. Carson writes, “If there is a bride here she remains inaccessible; it is her inaccessibility that is present, grammatically and erotically.”²⁴⁷ For Sappho, youth and beauty are symbolic of fleeting time that can only be preserved by the careful recollection of the beautiful moments.

(iii) On forgetting

Other girls, according to Sappho, will not be so blessed with remembrance.

κατθανοῖσα δὲ κείσῃ οὐδέ ποτα μναμοσύνα σέθεν
 ἔσσειτ' οὐδὲ πόθα εἰς ὕστερον· Ἴ οὐ γὰρ πεδέχῃς βρόδων
 τῶν ἐκ Πιερίας, ἀλλ' ἀφάνης κὰν Αἶδα δόμῳ
 φοιτάσῃς πεδ' ἀμαύρων νεκύων ἐκπεποταμένα.

dead you will lie, and not ever will there be memory of you
 nor desire for you, afterwards; for you will not share in the roses
 of Pieria, if you go, unseen, to the house of Hades
 drifting among the shadowy dead
 (Fr. 55)

Sappho’s poem is a cutting insult, not only condemning a girl as forgotten to the ravages of time, but also (on the basis of remembering as loving), insinuating that she is not loved. This fragment is frequently drawn upon by scholars to indicate Sappho’s interest in poetic immortality. That the roses are of Pieria, the home of the Muses, suggests that

²⁴⁵ Carson, *If Not, Winter*, 374.

²⁴⁶ Carson, *If Not, Winter*, 374.

²⁴⁷ Carson, *If Not, Winter*, 374.

these are the roses of the Muses. Hardie understands them to be worn in a *stephanos*, “as a mark of the bearer’s consecration and self-dedication to the goddesses.”²⁴⁸ He further suggests that “Sappho’s attack is motivated by her addressee’s lack of culture.”²⁴⁹ Similar to the uncultured girl in fragment 57, who does not know “how to tug her skirt to her ankles” (οὐκ ἐπισταμένα τὰ βράκε' ἔλκην ἐπὶ τῶν σφύρων),²⁵⁰ this woman does not wear a crown of roses showing her devotion to the Muses, and thus Sappho berates her for this unfashionable act of impiety. Refusing to address her by name, she renders her anonymous (and thus, also, unloved).

Occasionally, the poet herself expresses the fear of being forgotten: “and you would be forgetting me / or if you love some other man than me” (ἔμεθεν δ' ἔχρησθα λάθαν / ἢ τιν' ἄλλον ἀνθρώπων ἔμεθεν φίλησθα, frs. 129A, 129B). Fragment 129B corresponds to McEvilley’s concept that, for Sappho, to remember is to love. Her concern for being loved and being remembered belongs to her conversations around beauty and youth.

(iv) Exalting memory

The ‘us’ who is to be remembered in fragment 147 may call to mind moments in fragments 24A and 94, which show the poet and a lover enjoying beautiful moments together:

]ανάγα[
] . []εμνάσεσθ' ἀ[
 κ]αὶ γὰρ ἄμμεζ ἐν νεό[τατι
 ταῦτ' [ἐ]πόημεν·
 πόλλα [μ]ὲν γὰρ καὶ κά[λα
 . . . η . []μεν, πολι[

²⁴⁸ Hardie, “Sappho, the Muses, and Life after Death,” 18.

²⁴⁹ Hardie, “Sappho, the Muses, and Life after Death,” 18.

²⁵⁰ Line 3

ἄμμε[.]ὄ[ξ]είαις δ[
 .] . . [.] . . [

You will remember
 for even we, in youth
 were doing these things,
 indeed, many and even beautiful things
 ... the city
 we ... with sharp
 (Fr. 24A)

Sappho once again posits her certainty of future remembrance. It is notable that the girl is to remember the κάλα things: beauty becomes momentous.

As in fragment 94:

τεθνάκην δ' ἀδόλως θέλω·
 ἄ με ψισδομένα κατελίμπανεν
 πόλλα καὶ τόδ' ἔειπέ [μοι·
 'ὄμι' ὡς δεῖνα πεπ[όνθ]αμεν,
 Ψάφφ', ἦ μάν σ' ἀέκοισ' ἀπυλιμπάνω.'
 τὰν δ' ἔγω τάδ' ἀμειβόμαν·
 'χαίροισ' ἔρχεο κάμεθεν
 μέμναισ', οἴσθα γὰρ ὡς σε πεδήπομεν·
 αἰ δὲ μή, ἀλλά σ' ἔγω θέλω
 ὄμναισαι [. . .] . [. . .] . αι
 . . [] καὶ κάλ' ἐπάσχομεν·
 πο[λλοῖς γὰρ στεφάν]οις ἴων
 καὶ βρ[όδων κρο]κίων τ' ὕμοι
 κα . . [] πὰρ ἔμοι περεθήκαο,
 καὶ πό[λλαις ὑπα]θύμιδας
 πλέκ[ταις ἀμφ' ἀ]πάλα δέρα
 ἀνθέων ἔ[βαλες] πεποημμέναις,
 καὶ πολλῶ[] . μύρω
 βρενθείω . [] ρυ[. .]ν
 ἐξαλείψαο κα[ὶ βασ]ιλίῳ,
 καὶ στρώμν[αν ἐ]πὶ μολθάκαν
 ἀπάλαν πα . [] . . ὠν
 ἐξίης πόθο[ν] . νίδων,

κούτε τις[ού]τε τι
 ἴρον οὐδυ[]
 ἔπλετ' ὄππ[οθεν ἄμ]μες ἀπέσκομεν,
 οὐκ ἄλσος . [χ]όρος
]ψόφος
] . . .οιδιαι

I just want to die,
 she left, weeping

and she often said this,
 Alas, how terrible were the things we suffered
 Sappho, truly I leave you unwillingly

and I answer her this,
 Rejoicing, go, and remember me,
 for you know how we adored you

and if not, I want but to remind
 you
 ... and the beautiful things we experienced

For many wreathes of violets
 And of roses, and crocuses, ... together
 ... beside me, and you put round

many garlands of flowers,
 braided, around your soft neck,
 once finished, you created.

And much ... myrrh
 costly ...
 and anointed the noble one

And ... upon soft beds
 delicate ...
 You would satisfy desire

And no thing nor
 holy ...
 was from where we were absent

No grove ... the chorus
 sound
 ...

(Fr. 94)

Sappho describes moments of shared time in both of these fragments as *κάλα* and declares they will be remembered. Greene writes, “The repetition of *θέλω* [in fragment 94] in the parallel contexts of death and memory suggests the active transformative power of the poetic voice as it replaces the will to die with the will to create.”²⁵¹ Further, in that the natural imagery has been a method of creating tranquil space, these moments of beauty are similarly moments of peaceful remembrance. Particularly through poetry, a beauty in itself, recollection of these beautiful moments is made possible.

Our understanding of fragment 94 has been previously confused by scholars who think the first line is Sappho-singer’s suicidal death wish because “a host of scholars [...] were eager to hear Sappho confess to her total despair.”²⁵² Burnett has a “conviction that the tragic is not [Sappho’s] mode.”²⁵³ Instead, Burnett puts the confession in the girl’s mouth, mourning the loss of her girlhood. Thus, the singer consoles her, gently cajoling, exalting memory instead: the ritual of love in this poem deals with adornment, repeatedly, and the individual’s memory of being a part of this ritual is not mitigated because she moves on in her life and will be replaced by another girl in the *thiasos*. Burnett writes,

“With her *κάλ’ ἐπάσχομεν* (11), Sappho emends “the dreadful” to make it beautiful, while she reads “experience” not as suffering but as pleasure... The sweet moments of the past are here in the Sappho-lover’s speech in order that they may replace *δεῖνα* with *κάλα*. [...] Rather, “Remember me!” has expanded, in the lines that follow, to become “Remember beauty and pleasure!” – and this larger remembrance is offered as a happy talisman that can be taken anywhere.”²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ Greene, “Apostrophe,” 49.

²⁵² Burnett, “Desire and Memory,” 21.

²⁵³ Burnett, “Desire and Memory,” 17.

²⁵⁴ Burnett, “Desire and Memory,” 18.

The singer poeticizes pieces of adornment as modes of memory. In fragment 94, Sappho orders her young lover to remember her (κᾶμεθεν μέμναισ') and further wishes to remind the girl (ᾠμναισαι) of the beautiful moments they went through together (κάλ' ἐπάσχομεν).²⁵⁵ Konstan proposes that "when Sappho writes κάλ' ἐπάσχομεν (fr. 94.11), she is referring to the good or lovely things that she and Atthis experience together, not their visual appearance."²⁵⁶ However this leaves out the priority Sappho gives to the visual in recollecting her memories. For instance, in this fragment, the poet offers a litany of visual and sensual imagery as indicative of memory. These moments involve wreathes of violets and roses (στεφάνοις ἴων καὶ βρόδων),²⁵⁷ garlands of flowers (ὑπαθύμιδας πλέκταις [...] ἀνθέων),²⁵⁸ and perfume (μύρω).²⁵⁹ Sappho as poet calls these images of adornment into the girl's mind as tokens of happy times past. Reading broadly, these images of idyllic, natural spaces harken to the realm which Eva Stehle calls the "imaginary time of mythic, erotic plenitude",²⁶⁰ a fairy-tale realm of 'once upon a time' where the pain of the present is quelled through imagining the past. These images of now-vanished adornment are intended to soothe the girl's sorrow at her farewell. Natural and artificial beauty act as consolation to women for their grimmer, less sparkling reality. Diane Rayor writes that, in this fragment, Sappho "calls on memory to change the leave-taking from sorrow to joy by remembering their experiences together. Here the memory is a shared activity."²⁶¹ Burnett examines the shared activity as one of a ritual of love, as

²⁵⁵ The verb frequently has negative connotations, such as "suffered", and is an enigmatic use of diction.

²⁵⁶ Konstan, "Sappho 16," 24.

²⁵⁷ Line 12

²⁵⁸ Lines 15-17

²⁵⁹ Line 18

²⁶⁰ Eva Stehle, "'Once' and 'Now': Temporal Markers and Sappho's Self-Representation," in *The New Sappho on Old Age: Textual and Philosophical Issues*, ed. Ellen Greene, <https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/6038.9>.

²⁶¹ Rayor, "The Power of Memory," 63.

a “schema of experience” in which “a series of three habitually repeated gestures [which] will lead her to an equally prismatic memory of satisfied desire.”²⁶² These gestures are those of adornment: donning the flower crown as a symbol of readiness for love (and marriage); placing the garland over the vulnerable throat and breasts; and daubing perfume on the body to rouse lust.²⁶³ In what Burnett calls the “real goal” of the poem,²⁶⁴ “the girl should view herself and be viewed by others as a creature engaged in a repeated rite of embellishment, devotion, and celebration.”²⁶⁵ Thus, in recalling objects of beauty as a therapeutic memory, Sappho depicts adornment as beneficial not for its own sake, but for its ability to pleurably create memories. Through this, as Ellen Greene writes, “erotic fulfillment comes not from making the beloved a beautiful object of contemplation, but by drawing the beloved to her by making the beloved a part of the lover’s interior world of memory and imagination.”²⁶⁶ The experience between these two women can be recalled through objects of beauty even when their own beauty has faded.

(v) Adornment as order

Fragment 98A is thought to represent Sappho’s political exile,²⁶⁷ due to the ousting of the aristocratic ruler Alkaios by the elected-tyrant Pittakos. Sappho mourns the loss of her status, and she maligns her inability to obtain a purple hairband for “the girl with hair more golden than a blazing torch”, whom the Suda states was Sappho’s daughter, named after her mother.²⁶⁸

²⁶² Burnett, “Desire and Memory,” 23.

²⁶³ Burnett, “Desire and Memory,” 23-25.

²⁶⁴ Burnett, “Desire and Memory,” 25

²⁶⁵ Burnett, “Desire and Memory,” 26.

²⁶⁶ Greene, “Apostrophe,” 237-38.

²⁶⁷ Diane J. Rayor and André Lardinois, *Sappho : A New Translation of the Complete Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 120 and 125.

²⁶⁸ Sappho, Alcaeus, *Greek Lyric*, ed. and transl. David A. Campbell, 5.

[. .].θος· ἀ γάρ μ' ἐγέννα[τ' ἔφα ποτά·

[σ]φᾶς ἐπ' ἀλικίας μέγ[αν
[κ]όσμον αἴ τις ἔχη φόβα[ι]ς

[π]ορφύρωι κατελιξαμέν[α πλόκωι

[ἔ]μμεναι μάλα τοῦτο . [^]
[ἀ]λλ' ἀ ξανθοτέρα[ι]ς ἔχη[

[τ]α[ι]ς κόμα[ι]ς δάιδος προφ[ανεστέραις]

[σ]τεφάνοισιν ἐπαρτία[ις
[ἀ]νθέων ἐριθαλέων

[μ]ίτρα· [τ]ὰν δ' ἀρτίως Κλ[
ποικίλαν ἀπὸ Σαρδίω[ν
...] αονίας πόλεις

For the woman who bore me [once said]
in her maidenhood, the great
adornment: someone who wears bound in her tresses
a purple chaplet

This was better.
But for the lass with hair
more golden than a blazing pine-torch
[far better] for her to wear a garland
of very-blooming flowers

A hairband...recently...Kle[is]
kaleidoscopic from Sardis
[Ionian?] city
(Fr. 98A)

σοὶ δ' ἔγω Κλεί ποικίλαν
οὐκ ἔχω πόθεν ἔσσεται
μιτράν(αν)· ἀλλὰ τῷ Μυτιληνάῳ

.....

]· [
παι . α . ειον ἔχην πο . [
αἴκε . η ποικιλασκ [
.....

ταῦτα τὰς Κλεανακτίδα[ν
φύγας † . . .ισαπολισεχει †
μνάματ'· ἴδε γὰρ αἶνα διέρρουε[ν

For you, Kleis, I have no kaleidoscopic
headband – where will it come from? –
but the Mytilenean

...
...to have
kaleidoscopic ...

these memories of the Kleanaktides
escape...
for these things horribly wasted away

(Fr. 98B)

The μέγας κόσμος, was historically the purple chaplet or snood. The poet laments the fact that she cannot buy Kleis a purple hairband and tries to offer up garlands of flowers as a replacement. Carson proposes the significance of a woman's veil as necessary to the social order, drawing on the multiple uses of the word κόσμος. Carson claims that in the upheaval of the “vestiary code that regulates female decency in the ancient world” due to the lack of headware Sappho “is recording a personal chaos that extends from the boundaries of the body to the edge of civility.”²⁶⁹ Further, the loss of a headpiece signifies the loss of status. The poet insists upon an ordered system of adornment. Sappho's diction in ἐριθηλῆς speaks to the pervading mood of luxuriance – although significantly, this type of floral opulence is organic, found in nature, not man-made. Indeed, Sappho also deploys what Harold Zellner deems a “supra-superlative” in describing the young girl's hair as “more yellow than a torch” in his translation.²⁷⁰ This hyperbolic impossibility (what can be yellower than something extravagantly, blazingly yellow?) also uses colour as a sign of natural luxury – and here it is *in excelsis*. However, this is not to the exclusion of the luxury and goodness of the manufactured: Sappho

²⁶⁹ Carson, *If Not, Winter*, 372.

²⁷⁰ Harold Zellner, “Sappho's Supra-Superlatives,” *Classical Quarterly* 56 (2006): 293.

notably describes the μίτρα as ποικίλαν – the multihued, variegated half of the compound used for Aphrodite’s throne in fragment 1. Symbols of the East permeate this poem.

Further, Leslie Kurke suggests that the μίτρα is “an emblem for the whole ‘cult of ἀβρότης.’”²⁷¹ In that the object and its wearer are equated, Kurke posits that “the power of the fragment depends on the equivalence of *mitra* and maiden: Sappho has as little control over the exchange of the girls as she does over the Lydian headband, and the fragment registers that helplessness.”²⁷² As Carson says, “In this poem style is a deep need.”²⁷³ This “need”, as Carson puts it, is both personal and social; personal style keeps social order. However, we must not forget the solace Sappho attempts to find in the floral wreath. Perhaps in the privation of the society of splendour, in her exile, Sappho recognizes, either desperately or hopefully, the salvific power of the divinity in nature.

Finally, in fragment 98B, after Sappho has lamented the lack of a μίτρα, she mentions a μνημα, a memorial-object or keepsake which “horribly wasted away.” Thus there is an absence of both a μίτρα and a μνημα – if we link these two, however tentatively, and accord it with the position adornment has in fragment 94, then Sappho uses adornment as a mode of memory, a tool for its transmission.

The poet considers the inevitability of aging and the fading of physical beauty. She anticipates this evanescence and even anticipates a future regret and fast-forwarded nostalgia for her and her circle’s youth. She memorializes her youth symbolically through flowers, and in turn she expresses beauty through her poetry. In writing and in memorializing her past loves, she becomes an historian of her own romance. Sappho

²⁷¹ Kurke, “Politics of ἀβροσύνη in Archaic Greece,” 97.

²⁷² Kurke, “Politics of ἀβροσύνη in Archaic Greece,” 101.

²⁷³ Carson, *If Not, Winter*, 373.

delights in luxury and even as she ages, she shares and can partake in this wisdom with the girls of her circle. Sappho professes that beauty is momentous, and these memories should be recollected to preserve the beautiful shared experiences. Further, even daily objects of adornment that lend themselves to recollection, like the way the scent of perfume conjures memories of long ago. Sappho confidently asserts that she will be remembered in the future, but she also prays for this honour.

In the ruins that still stand of her poetry, Sappho foretells her own fame. An epitaph for her in the *Palatine Anthology* reads:

As you bypass the Aeolian tomb, stranger, do not say I am dead,
 I the songmaker of Mytilene.
 For hands of men made this and such human works
 vanish into quick oblivion.
 But if you rate me by the grace of the Muses, from each of whom
 I put a flower beside my own nine,
 you will realize I escaped the shadowland of Hades nor will there be
 a sunlit day that lacks the name of lyric Sappho.
 – Tullius Laurea *Palatine Anthology* 7.17²⁷⁴

While the poet betrays a fear of aging, her use of floral imagery shows how she manipulates the passage of time to memorialize moments of beauty. Her concept of *παρθενία* as maidenhood explores a state of youthfulness on the brink of aging into adulthood and she romanticizes the beauty of this youth in song. Memory then becomes an important social honour, as Sappho states her future remembrance as poetic fame. Following the equation that remembering is loving, Sappho wants to reap remembrance, and thus, also love. She sows seeds of beauty in the hopes that it will be a lasting

²⁷⁴ Translation from Carson, *If Not, Winter*, 396.

monument. She creates scenes where women remember each other through adornment and objects of beauty, thus showing the power beauty has to recall the past.

Chapter 5. Conclusions

Sappho's aesthetics rely on the connected nature of the physically beautiful and ethically good. Her poetry shows both explicitly and implicitly how women engage in 'the beautiful' through proper adornment for their peers and the divine. Even 'being good' is beauty. In her poems which use her favoured vocabulary of beauty, we see a synthesis of the human, divine, and natural worlds which mix beautiful language with imagery. Being beautiful manifests desire and being desired manifests beauty. Beauty also becomes a mode of time and memory as it pauses moments for remembrance and also later recalls them. The poet retroactively remembers these moments as imbued with the same atmosphere of paradisiac serenity as the tranquility of the natural world's beauty. Her love of luxury is tied to her political position in the elite sphere of archaic Lesbos. In denigrating the ugly and disordered, she excludes those not in her social community from appropriately communicating with the divine. Beauty becomes an instrument of memory, a way to recall moments of past opulence, either through a beautiful object or by recalling such an object. This style of remembrance heals the mind in the midst of present anguish. In each fragment, Sappho the poet becomes a different historiographer: sometimes bitterly triumphant (as in fragment 1), often melancholic and in every reading concerned with immortalizing the moment as it is. But the moment as it is, in each poem, is always fading away, just like the flowers the poet persistently plants throughout the landscape of her poetry. Beyond this, objects of beauty act as mnemonic objects, recalling past moments of happiness. Beauty in objects becomes a mode of memory which immortalizes moments of desire. Further studies could reflect upon this attitude towards luxury and beauty in later ages of Greece, or in the reception of Sappho.

Sappho's theory of beauty is one in which beauty is socially and religiously ethical. Just as the natural world displays sublime beauty, humans (women particularly) should strive for luxury in their adornment as a means to both commune with the divine, and for Sappho herself, to prophecy her poetic immortality.

Sappho imbues her poetry with awe-inspiring imagery. The vocabulary surrounding κάλος, which encompasses her philosophy of beauty, offers an alternative response to beauty. One can react with desire and lust, and she meditates upon this. But she also offers beauty as respite from tribulations of *pothos* and bittersweet *eros*. In the sensory, empirical, experiential, and subjective beauty that gives us pleasure, Sappho allows us to dwell in the moment like prayer. How long do we stare at a painting? How long do we watch a sunset? As long as time lets us. For Sappho, beauty can be considered as interlude, not a lacunic gap or caesura, but as space for tranquil reflection and stimulus for thought and creation.

What appeals to so many in Sappho's poetry is the constant evocation of beauty, whether in the proliferation of idyllic natural imagery or the descriptions of beautiful women.

Sappho offers the listener her beautiful singing:

τάδε νῦν ἐταίραις
ταῖς ἔμαις † τέρπνα † κάλως ἀείσω.

And now, for my companions,
in order to delight, I will beautifully sing.

(Fr. 160)

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