

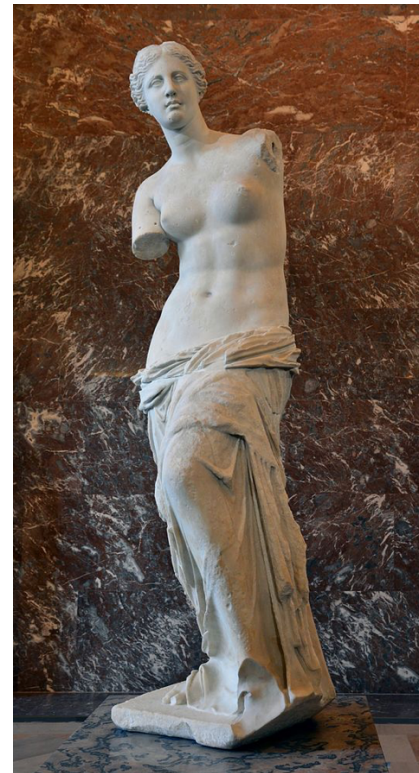
The Jewish reception of Sappho at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Heinrich Heine, as quoted by Emma Lazarus:

It was in May, 1848, the last day I went out, that I took leave of my lovely idols whom I had worshipped in the time of my happiness. I crawled painfully as far as the Louvre, and I almost fainted away when I entered the lofty hall, where the ever-blessed Goddess of Beauty, our beloved Lady of Milo, stands upon her pedestal. I lay for a long time at her feet, and I wept so bitterly that even a stone would have pitied me. And indeed the goddess looked down upon me compassionately, yet at the same time so disconsolately, as if she would say: "Do you not see that I have no arms, and that I cannot help you." (Lazarus as cited by Fried, 2010, 43)

Venus of the Louvre
By
Emma Lazarus

Down the long hall she glistens like a star,
The foam-born mother of Love, transfixed to stone,
Yet none the less immortal, breathing on.
Time's brutal hand hath maimed but could not mar.
When first the enthralled enchantress from afar (5)
Dazzled mine eyes, I saw not her alone,
Serenely poised on her world-worshipped throne,
As when she guided once her dove-drawn car,—
But at her feet a pale, death-stricken Jew,
Her life adorer, sobbed farewell to love. (10)
Here *Heine* wept! Here still he weeps anew,
Nor ever shall his shadow lift or move,
While mourns one ardent heart, one poet-brain,
For vanished Hellas and Hebraic pain.



Sappho fragment 1, Hymn to Aphrodite

ποικιλόθρον' ἀθανάτ' Ἀφρόδιτα,
παῖ Δίος δολόπλοκε, λίσσομαί σε,
μή μ' ἄσαισι μήδ' ὀνίαισι δάμνα,
πότνια, θῦμον·

Intricately enthroned immortal Aphrodite,
daughter of Zeus, weaver of wiles, I beg you:
do not with ache and anguish, overpower my
heart, mistress,

ἀλλὰ τυίδ' ἔλθ', αἶ ποτα κατέρωτα (5)
τὰς ἔμας αὖδας αἰοῖσα πῆλοι
ἔκλυες, πάτρος δὲ δόμον λίποισα
χρύσιον ἦλθες,
ἄρμ' ὑπασδεύξαισα· κάλοι δέ σ' ἄγον
ῶκεες στρουθοὶ περὶ γὰς μελαίνας (10)
πύκνα δίνεεντες πτέρ' ἀπ' ὠράνω αἰθέ-
ρος διὰ μέσσω...

Sappho fragment 31

φαίνεται μοι κῆνος ἴσος θεοῖσιν
ἔμμεν' ὦνηρ, ὅττις ἐνάντιός τοι
ἰσθάνει καὶ πλάσιον ἅδ' ὤφονεί-
σας ὑπακοῦει
καὶ γελαίσας ἰμέροεν, τό μ' ἦ μὰν (5)
καρδίαν ἐν στήθεσιν ἐπτόαισεν·
ὥς γὰρ εἰσίδω βρόχε' ὥς με φώνας
οὐδὲν ἔτ' εἴκει,
ἀλλὰ ἔκαμ' μὲν γλῶσσα ἔξαγε' ἔλεπτον
δ' αὐτίκα χρῶ πῦρ ὑπαδεδρόμακεν, (10)
ὀππάτεσσι δ' οὐδὲν ὄρημ' ἐπιβρό-
μεισι δ' ἄκουαι,
ἔκαδε' μ' ἰδρῶς κακχέεται, τρόμος δὲ
παῖσαν ἄγρει, χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας
ἔμμι, τεθνάκην δ' ὀλίγω 'πιδεύης (15)
φαίνομ' ἔμ' αὐτά.
ἀλλὰ πὰν τόλματον, ἐπεὶ ἔκαὶ πένητα

but come here, if ever at another time
hearing my voice from far away
you listened and leaving your father's golden
house, you came,
with chariot yoked: and beautiful swift
sparrows brought you above the black earth
whirring fast-beating wings down from heaven
through the middle air...

That one seems to me like the gods
the man who sits opposite you
and nearby listens to you
speaking sweetly
and laughing charmingly, a thing that has
excited my heart in my chest.
For when I look at you for a moment,
then it is no longer possible for me to speak;
but my tongue has broken,
at once a subtle fire has run under my skin
and I see nothing with my eyes,
and my ears buzz,
sweat pours over me, and a trembling
seizes me altogether, and I am paler than grass,
and it seems to me that I am little short of
dying.
But all can be endured, since . . . even a poor
man...

Osip Mandelstam

Upon Pieria's great stone cascades
The muses were conducting their first choir
And just like bees, the blind musicians made
Gifts of Ionian honey from their lyres.
From a young woman's convex forehead
Cold air blew in gusts like rays of sun
So that the archipelago's tender coffins
Would be visible to the far-off great-grand-
son.

The springtime stomps across the meadows of
Hellas,
The rainbow-booted Sappho runs along
Cicadas ring as if with tiny hammers
And interweave like tendrils with sweet song.
The carpenter has built a giant tower,
For wedding day they suffocated hens
And to create the shoes the clumsy cobbler
Has stretched and tattered all the five ox
skins.

Unhurried and unkempt is tortoise-lyre
Like something legless barely crawling past
She lies under the sunshine of Epirus,
Her golden stomach warming not-too-fast.
Well, who in such a shape will care for her,
Who'll turn her over while she sleeps at night?
In dreams she is awaiting for Terpander
Sensing at dawn the drying fingers' flight.

Cold dew is feeding oaks with gentle ease
The unkempt grass with erudition speaks her
view,
Honeycomb falls to the delight of bees —
Oh, holy isles, exactly where are you,
Where broken bread is never eaten,
Where there is only honey, wine and milk,
Where fiddle's labor does not reach the
heaven,
And languorously turns the fortune's wheel.

(based on translations from Russian by Monas
and Shambat)

Sappho fragment 55

καθάνοισα δὲ κείσῃ οὐδέ ποτα μναμοσύνα
σέθεν ἔσσειτ' οὐδὲ πόθα εἰς ὕστερον· οὐ γὰρ
πεδέχῃς βρόδωντῶν ἐκ Πιερίας, ἀλλ' ἀφάνης
κὰν Αἶδα δόμοφροϊτάσης πεδ' ἀμαύρων
νεκύων ἐκπεποταμένα.

But when you die you will lie there, and
afterwards there will never be any recollection
of you or any longing for you since you have
no share in the roses of Pieria; unseen in the
house of Hades also, flown from our midst,
you will go to and fro among the shadowy
corpses. (Campbell, 1982)

Sappho fragment 146

μήτε μοι μέλι μήτε μέλισσα
For me neither honey nor bee.

Sappho fragment 110

θυρώρῳ πόδες ἐπτορόγνιοι,
τὰ δὲ σάμβαλα πεμπεβόηα,
πίσσυγγοι δὲ δέκ' ἐξεπόναισαν.

The door-keeper's feet are seven fathoms long,
and his sandals are made from five ox-hides;
ten cobblers worked hard to make them.
(Campbell, 1982)

Sappho fragment 111

ἴγροι δὴ τὸ μέλαθρον,
ὕμνηαον,
ἀέρρετε, τέκτονες ἄνδρες·
ὕμνηαον. γάμβρος † (εἰς)έρχεται ἴσος † Ἄρεσι,
ἄνδρος μεγάλῳ πόλῳ μέσδων.

On high the roof—Hymenaeus!—raise up, you
carpenters—Hymenaeus! The bridegroom is
coming, the equal of Ares, much larger than a
large man. (Campbell, 1982).

Sappho fragment 58

φιλάοιδον λιγύραν χελύνναν
fond of singing clear tortoise-shell lyre.

Osip Mandelstam

Return to the incestuous womb
Whence, Leah, thou hast issued,
Because over the sun of Ilium
Thou hast preferred the yellow gloom.
Go, no one shall touch thee;
Onto her father's bosom, into deep night,
Let the incestuous daughter
Drop her head.
But a fateful transformation
Is to be fulfilled in thee:
Leah thou shalt be, not Helen,
Called, not because
It is harder for royal blood
To course in veins than for any other—
No, thou shalt come to love a Judean,
Disappear in him—and God be with you.

(translated from the Russian by Friedin)

Raisa Troianker

Swifter than a fast mouse
A rumor will run through the lanes:
“Our *shames*’s daughter has come from
Kharkiv.”
Tiers and grief will fill the eyes of the
shames.

An unexpected surprise for the old one.
Here he is, with his old glasses, fixed with
threads,
Barefoot, in a yellow *tales* and blue *yarmulke*,
Anxious. Spasms heard in his voice.
Dad is old and weak, as an exhausted autumn.

*

The grass has faded and the fall is numb.
It happened. What’s that? Am I alive?
In the grass my braids got entangled and
dispersed,
My body and head are in fever...

My heart is heavy and anxious.
And you, lost, cannot caress me.
And what has happened cannot be reversed.
And my heart is compressed with cold.

(translated from the Ukrainian by Petrovsky-
Shtern).

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