

## Absent Adonis: Setting and Speaker in the Poetry of the Adonia

The poetic fragments of Greek lyric act as potent tools for understanding the author's social and cultural contexts, acting as shards of a magnifying glass aimed at their religious practices, inherited literary techniques, and individual personality. Through these prismatic constructions, this presentation explores how two different authors interact with the same mythic material of Adonis. Adonis and his associated religious festival, the Adonia, poses a rich nexus of material regarding gender relations, community religious practice, and emotion. In order to understand the relationship of individuals to the myth of Adonis, I compare two fragments: Sappho *LP* 140a and Praxilla *PMG* 747.

I begin with an overview of the Adonis myth and its iteration within the festival of the Adonia, then move to the poetry of the two main authors. Both fragments are striking, though in drastically different ways. Under Sappho and Praxilla's parallel attention to Adonis lies oppositional approaches to the poetic construction of narrative speaker. Centering this construction, the speaker-as-character, as the focus point, I argue that both fragments can be considered within a ritual performance context and in doing so elucidate further the emotive realities of the celebration of the Adonia.

The argument that Sappho 140a is a religious hymn has been waged many times over (Lardinois 1994; Yatromanolakis 2007). Expanding upon this conflict, I explore the fragment in terms of its speakers, as its dialogic construction exemplifies what we currently understand as primary to the ritual of the Adonia. In the context of the Adonia, Sappho's speaker-as-characters and the poem's real performers would enact the ritual's performance of communal mourning for

Adonis (Scodel 2021). Given this, I propose that we can use this fragment as a foundational model for understanding the emotional process of the Adonia for the female worshippers.

In contrast, Praxilla's approach to Adonis is strikingly more personal than Sappho's. Far from the dirge of a lost lover, Praxilla assumes Adonis as the speaker-as-character and finds the emotive response within his voice, not on behalf of his image. Again, I argue for the likely use of this fragment in a ritual context, though with hesitation in mind, as Praxilla's performance context is likewise contested. Even if not satisfyingly certain enough within the context of the Adonia itself, Praxilla's focused harmony of humanity and reality within the fragment reflects a real connection to the themes and realities of the mythology. As the known rites of the Adonia, including those described by Sappho, hinge on Adonis's death, Praxilla's choice here is unusual. I engage with the attested facts of the ritual celebration from ancient authors and propose that we view Praxilla's fragment as an alternative construction of grieving and the celebration of life during the Adonia, pushing against our current understandings of the emotional realities of Adonis worship as only Sappho's perspective would provide.

Finally, I bring in Nossis 5 (*AP* 6.275) and Theocritus's *Idyll* 15 as a reflection point. Here, I further work to situate my earlier conclusions within feminist frameworks of emotion, minding especially the communal context of the Adonia. In this way, I engage with the works of Eva Stehle (1996), Ruth Simms (1997), and Marilyn Skinner (1989, 2005). I also build off of Celsiana Warwick's (2025) recent work on the tension of masculinity in relation to the Adonia. Overall, this presentation examines the literary constructions of setting and speaker in the fragments of Sappho and Praxilla on the topic of Adonis. I look to parse through poetry the expressions of gender, sexuality, and emotion within the ritual of the Adonia.

## Works Cited

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