

Ludic Sappho: A View into Sapphic Poetics

One of the recent perspectives on Sappho is to look for ordinary speech genres as the origins from which literary genres derive. Lardinois has argued that parts of Sapphic poetry, such as fr. 1, function like a parallel of the *Homeric Hymns* which both invoke the divine and present an extended narrative of the prayer kernel. For Sappho, prayers to female deities, laments and praise of brides are distinct oral genres that a wider part of the community would be familiar with. Although there is strong controversy and a great spectrum of scholarly opinions on the performance aspect, function and role of Sappho's poetry, it is with no doubt that she was famous in the ancient world, among other things, for her wedding song repertoire (with one book in the Alexandrian edition, the so-called 9th book) dedicated to wedding poetry. The wedding theme remains prominent in other parts as, for example, in fr. 44, a poem that has been labeled as a wedding song (Merkelbach 1957 and others) and has been read with a focus on its performative context (Lardinois 2001), its place in early Greek epic tradition (Kakridis 1966, Ferrari 1986, Schrenk 1994, Bowie 2010). With most of the shorter 'wedding' poems as a starting point (namely fr. 108-117A with a special emphasis on fr. 114, the famous 'lament' for the loss of virginity) and a focus on some of the less explored fragments (49 and 57) and the better known fr. 1, I argue that Sappho's aesthetics presents a direct and intimate voice that is exteriorized by breaking boundaries, seeming candid and genuine. In fact, so much that it resembles, I argue further, a child's voice, one that is able to articulate emotion in often crude terms as reflected in Sappho's "I" persona in particular. Children's songs, just as any oral repertoire, spring from shared experiences in a social context. Some reflect child play and children's social upbringing and often includes

teasing and reproach whereas others absorb the adult world and allude clearly to topics like work such as weaving, death, separation and personal and communal trauma translated in different imagery. Comparing certain Sappho fragments with references from Erinna and Pollux who allude or refer to ancient girls' tag games, one sees striking similarities in some of the Sapphic patterns of discourse (such as germination in the apostrophe, use of dialogue, themes of fleeing and coming back, among others). The closed circuit of mother child (just like in lullabies) is also an integral aspect of child poetics (in particular fr. 102, and fr. 104a which has been interpreted as a lullaby with its distinctive use of a masked imperative, reference to the natural world of animals and the close contact of mother and child). In fact with a comparative view to other oral traditions there is a marked fluidity between children's and adult's genres. It is usually a commonplace to think that children's genres *imitate* adult genres. Beyond the obvious one-way absorption of so to speak adult themes by children's songs, orality works in far more intricate ways. Lyric imagery is permeating and informs adult and children's repertoires in far less distinct ways, so that it should not be thought as a one-way process (adult themes morphing into children's songs) but rather the opposite direction is also at work. My thesis is that the ludic is another kernel that lies at the deep structures of Sapphic poetics and touches a number of her poems.

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