

## Love and Death in Sappho 31 and 58

This paper will examine parallels between Sappho 31 and the newly-reconstituted Poem 58 (Gronewald and Daniel 2004; Janko 2005; West 2005; Greene and Skinner 2009). So far, studies examining similarities between these two poems have largely focused on how both poems represent the Sapphic body as assaulted by external forces, old age in poem 58 and *eros* in poem 31 (Wills 1967; McEvilley 1978; O'Higgins 1990; Furley 2000, Johnson 2009). Despite the undeniably debilitating effects of *eros* and old age conveyed so vividly in Poems 31 and 58, I shall argue that these poems also reveal the creative and regenerative potential of *eros*. I plan to show that the speaker in both poems achieves both a reconstitution of self and emotional recovery through her ability to contemplate her experience as part of a larger whole.

In Fragment 31, the speaker's recovery arises through an acknowledgment of the cyclical nature of desire. In the last four lines of Poem 58 the speaker shifts her focus from the experience of loss to a reflection on what she has gained through a life lived in passionate pursuit of beauty, desire, and poetic imagination. This is expressed not only by the speaker's declaration of love for refinement—a quality and way of life epitomized by the Muses, but also by her confident assertion that, because of Eros, she has obtained the Sun's brightness and beauty. I shall argue that this assertion both mitigates the speaker's sense of loss and implies that her creative endeavors (i.e. erotic poetry) have illuminated not only her life but her "afterlife" as well. To be sure, my argument is predicated on the inclusion of the last four lines of the poem (Boedeker 2009). This is a controversial issue which I plan to address in my paper. I argue for the inclusion of these last four lines, first in terms of how they may represent an alternative performance tradition (Boedeker 2009), and second how they fit more logically within the poem's own structure and context.

## Bibliography

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