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VOLUME A

Beginnings to A.D. 100



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"Son of Laërtês and the gods of old,
Odysseus, master of land ways and sea ways,
command yourself. Call off this battle now,
or Zeus who views the wide world may be angry."

565

He yielded to her, and his heart was glad.
Both parties later swore to terms of peace
set by their arbiter, Athena, daughter
of Zeus who bears the stormcloud as a shield—
though still she kept the form and voice of Mentor.

570

SAPPHO OF LESBOS

born ca. 630 B.C.

About Sappho's life we know very little: she was born about 630 B.C. on the fertile island of Lesbos off the coast of Asia Minor and spent most of her life there; she was married and had a daughter. Her lyric poems (poems sung to the accompaniment of the lyre) were so admired in the ancient world that a later poet called her the tenth Muse. In the third century B.C. scholars at the great library in Alexandria arranged her poems in nine books, of which the first contained more than a thousand lines. But what we have now is a pitiful remnant: one (or possibly two) complete, short poems, and a collection of quotations from her work by ancient writers, supplemented by bits and pieces written on ancient scraps of papyrus found in excavations in Egypt. Yet these remnants fully justify the enthusiasm of the ancient critics; Sappho's poems (insofar as we can guess at their nature from the fragments) give us the most vivid evocation of the joys and sorrows of love in all Greek literature.

Her themes are those of a Greek woman's world—girlhood, marriage, and love, especially the love of young women for each other and the poignancy of their parting as they leave to assume the responsibilities of a wife. About the social context of these songs we can only guess; all that can be said is that they reflect a world in which women, at least women of the aristocracy, lived an intense communal life of their own, one of female occasions, functions, and festivities, in which their young passionate natures were fully engaged with each other; to most of them, presumably, this was a stage preliminary to their later career in that world as wife and mother.

The first two poems printed here were quoted in their entirety by ancient critics (though it is possible that there was another stanza at the end of the second); their text is not a problem. But the important recent additions to our knowledge of Sappho's poetry, the pieces of ancient books found in Egypt, are difficult to read and usually full of gaps. Our third selection, in fact, comes from the municipal rubbish heap of the Egyptian village Oxyrhynchus. Most of the gaps in the text are due to holes or tears in the papyrus and can easily be filled in from our knowledge of Sappho's dialect and the strict meter in which she wrote, but the end of the third stanza and the whole of the fourth are imaginative reconstructions by the translator. The papyrus, for instance, tells us only that someone or something led Helen astray; Lattimore's "Queen of Cyprus" (the love goddess, Aphrodite) may well be right but is not certain. In the next stanza all that we have is part of a word that means something like "flexible" (Lattimore's "hearts that can be persuaded"); an adverb, *lightly*; and "remembering Anaktoria who is not here." As a matter of fact we don't have that all-important *not*, but the sense demands it. Fortunately, the final stanza, with its telling echo of the opening theme, is almost intact.

A fine recent translation of Sappho's poetry, with excellent introduction and notes, is given in Diane Rayor, *Sappho's Lyre: Archaic Lyric and Women Poets of Ancient Greece* (1991). Accessible surveys from varying points of view may be found in Jane M. Snyder, *The Woman and the Lyre: Women Writers in Classical Greece and Rome* (1989), Richard Jenkyns, *Three Classical Poets: Sappho, Catullus, and Juvenal* (1982), and Anne Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets: Archilochus, Alcaeus, Sappho* (1983). An outstanding assessment of Sappho's position as a woman in Greek society is John J. Winkler, "Double Consciousness in Sappho's Lyrics," in his *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (1990). Page duBois, *Sappho Is Burning* (1995), is a challenging discussion of Sappho's poetry as resisting the categories of Western thought.

[LYRICS]

[Throned in splendor, deathless, O Aphrodite]¹

Throned in splendor, deathless, O Aphrodite,²
 child of Zeus, charm-fashioner, I entreat you
 not with griefs and bitternesses to break my
 spirit, O goddess:

standing by me rather, if once before now 5
 far away you heard, when I called upon you,
 left your father's dwelling place and descended,
 yoking the golden

chariot to sparrows,³ who fairly drew you
 down in speed aslant the black world, the bright air 10
 trembling at the heart to the pulse of countless
 fluttering wingbeats.

Swiftly then they came, and you, blessed lady,
 smiling on me out of immortal beauty,
 asked me what affliction was on me, why I 15
 called thus upon you,

what beyond all else I would have befall my
 tortured heart: "Whom then would you have Persuasion
 force to serve desire in your heart? Who is it,
 Sappho, that hurt you?" 20

Though she now escape, she soon will follow;
 though she take not gifts from you, she will give them:
 though she love not, yet she will surely love you
 even unwilling."

In such guise come even again and set me 25
 free from doubt and sorrow; accomplish all those

1. All selections translated by Richmond Lattimore. 2. A prayer to the goddess of love, Aphrodite. The translator has skillfully reproduced the metrical form of the Greek, the "Sapphic" stanza. 3. Aphrodite's sacred birds.

things my heart desires to be done; appear and
stand at my shoulder.

[Like the very gods in my sight is he]

Like the very gods in my sight is he who
sits where he can look in your eyes, who listens
close to you, to hear the soft voice, its sweetness
murmur in love and

laughter, all for him. But it breaks my spirit; 5
underneath my breast all the heart is shaken.
Let me only glance where you are, the voice dies,
I can say nothing,

but my lips are stricken to silence, under- 10
neath my skin the tenuous flame suffuses;
nothing shows in front of my eyes, my ears are
muted in thunder.

And the sweat breaks running upon me, fever
shakes my body, paler I turn than grass is; 15
I can feel that I have been changed, I feel that
death has come near me.

[Some there are who say that the fairest thing seen]

Some there are who say that the fairest thing seen
on the black earth is an array of horsemen;
some, men marching; some would say ships; but I say
she whom one loves best

is the loveliest. Light were the work to make this 5
plain to all, since she, who surpassed in beauty
all mortality, Helen, once forsaking
her lordly husband,

fled away to Troy—land across the water. 10
Not the thought of child nor beloved parents
was remembered, after the Queen of Cyprus¹
won her at first sight.

Since young brides have hearts that can be persuaded
easily, light things, palpitant to passion 15
as am I, remembering Anaktória
who has gone from me

1. Aphrodite.

and whose lovely walk and the shining pallor
of her face I would rather see before my
eyes than Lydia's chariots in all their glory
armored for battle.

20

AESCHYLUS

524?–456 B.C.

The earliest documents in the history of the Western theater are the seven plays of Aeschylus that have come down to us through the more than twenty-four hundred years since his death. When he produced his first play in the opening years of the fifth century B.C., the performance that we know as drama was still less than half a century old, still open to innovation—and Aeschylus, in fact, made such significant contributions to its development that he has been called “the creator of tragedy.”

The origins of the theatrical contests in Athens are obscure; they were a puzzle even for Aristotle, who in the fourth century B.C. wrote a famous treatise on tragedy. All that we know for certain is that the drama began as a religious celebration that took the form of song and dance.

Such ceremonies are of course to be found in the communal life of many early cultures, but it was in Athens, and in Athens alone, that the ceremony gave rise to what we know as tragedy and comedy and produced dramatic masterpieces that are still admired, read, and performed.

At some time in the late sixth century B.C. the Athenians converted what seems to have been a rural celebration of Dionysus, a vegetation deity especially associated with the vine, into an annual city festival at which dancing choruses, competing for prizes, sang hymns of praise to the god. It was from this choral performance that tragedy and comedy developed. Some unknown innovator (his name was probably Thespis) combined the choral song with the speech of a masked actor, who, playing a god or hero, engaged the chorus in dialogue. It was Aeschylus who added a second actor and so created the possibility of conflict and the prototype of the drama as we know it.

After the defeat of the Persian invaders (480–479 B.C.), as Athens with its fleets and empire moved toward supremacy in the Greek world, this spring festival became a splendid occasion. The Dionysia, as it was now called, lasted for four or five days, during which public business (except in emergencies) was suspended and prisoners were released on bail for the duration of the festival. In an open-air theater that could seat seventeen thousand spectators, tragic and comic poets competed for the prizes offered by the city. Poets in each genre had been selected by the magistrates for the year. On each of three days of the festival, a tragic poet presented three tragedies and a satyr play (a burlesque on a mythic theme), and a comic poet produced one comedy.

The three tragedies could deal with quite separate stories or, as in the case of Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, with the successive stages of one extended action. By the time this trilogy was produced (458 B.C.) the number of actors had been raised to three; the spoken part of the performance became steadily more important. In the *Oresteia* an equilibrium between the two elements of the performance has been established. The actors, with their speeches, create the dramatic situation and its movement, the plot; the chorus, while contributing to dramatic suspense and illusion, ranges free of the immediate situation in its odes, which extend and amplify the significance of the action.

CATULLUS

84?–54? B.C.

Gaius Valerius Catullus, born in the northern Italian city of Verona, lived out his short life in the last violent century of the Roman republic, but his poetry gives little hint that it was produced amid political upheaval. The 116 poems by him that have come down to us present a rich variety: imitations of Greek poets, long poems on Greek mythological themes, scurrilous personal attacks on contemporary politicians and private individuals, lighthearted verses designed to amuse his friends, and a magnificent marriage hymn. He also wrote a series of poems about his love affair with a Roman woman he calls Lesbia but who may have been Clodia, the enchanting but complex sister of one of Rome's most violent aristocrats turned political gangster. These poems, from which our selection is taken, present all the phases of the liaison, from the unalloyed happiness of the first encounters through doubt and hesitation to despair and virulent accusation, ending in heartbroken resignation to the bitter fact of Lesbia's betrayal.

Their tone ranges from the heights of joy at passionate love requited through the torments of simultaneous love and hate to the depths of morbid self-pity. Their direct and simple language seems to give readers immediate access to the experience of desire and betrayal and the feelings it arouses. In one sense, this impression is surely correct. But the poems are exceedingly complex. The passion is joined with considerable learning, and it is one of the remarkable characteristics of Catullus's poetry that strong emotion and sophistication are not at odds with each other but complementary. Poem 51, for example, powerfully describes the physical symptoms of love in the speaker; it is a translation into Latin of one of Sappho's most passionate Greek lyrics. Or consider poem 2, on Lesbia's pet sparrow: scholars have long suspected, probably correctly, an obscene double meaning in this pet.

There are further complexities. Many of the poems are addressed to someone—Lesbia, Catullus himself, or some third party—and the reader is a privileged audience to this communication. Who the addressee is and the relation between that person and the poet subtly shape the reader's view of the situation described in each poem. In poem 83, for example, when Lesbia seems to abuse "Catullus" in the presence of her husband, the speaker interprets this as a sign of love to which the husband is obtusely oblivious. Perhaps. Or is this a wishful interpretation? Who really is the dupe? Does the reader ever get access to Lesbia's feelings? Catullus's poetry is not simply a spontaneous outpouring of emotion, but a carefully meditated portrayal of a love affair in which the poet's persona as well as his mistress is a character; and that gives depth and range to its passion.

The best general introduction to Catullus, with essential background and perceptive discussion of the poetry, is Charles Martin, *Catullus* (1992). For more detailed but highly readable discussions of contemporary culture and society, Clodia and her circle, and the poems' relation to this context, T. P. Wiseman, *Catullus and His World: A Reappraisal* (1985), is excellent. Two older books are still valuable: A. L. Wheeler, *Catullus and the Traditions of Ancient Poetry* (1934), and E. A. Havelock, *The Lyric Genius of Catullus* (1964). The first puts Catullus in his cultural and literary context; the second translates selected poems and offers a sensitive appreciation of them. Kenneth Quinn, *Catullus: An Interpretation* (1973), gives an interesting if idiosyncratic view of the poetry. For a depiction of Catullus as well as Lesbia/Clodia and her circle in a carefully researched historical detective novel, see Steven Saylor, *The Venus Throw* (1995).

PRONOUNCING GLOSSARY

The following list uses common English syllables and stress accents to provide rough equivalents of selected words whose pronunciation may be unfamiliar to the general reader.

Aurelius: *ow-ree'-lee-us*Hyr cani: *heer-kah'-nee*Catullus: *kah-tul'-lus*Sagae: *sah'-gai*

[LYRICS]

5¹

Lesbia, let us live only for loving,
 and let us value at a single penny
 all the loose flap of senile busybodies!
 Suns when they set are capable of rising,
 but at the setting of our own brief light 5
 night is one sleep from which we never waken.
 Give me a thousand kisses, then a hundred,
 another thousand next, another hundred,
 a thousand without pause & then a hundred,
 until when we have run up our thousands 10
 we will cry bankrupt, hiding our assets
 from ourselves & any who would harm us,
 knowing the volume of our trade in kisses.

2

Sparrow, you darling pet of my beloved,
 which she caresses, presses to her body
 or teases with the tip of one sly finger
 until you peck at it in tiny outrage!
 —for there are times when my desired, shining 5
 lady is moved to turn to you for comfort,
 to find (as I imagine) ease for ardor,
 solace, a little respite from her sorrow—
 if I could only play with you as she does,
 and be relieved of my tormenting passion! 10

51²

To me that man seems like a god in heaven,
 seems—may I say it?—greater than all gods are,
 who sits by you & without interruption
 watches you, listens

1. All selections translated by Charles Martin. The order of the poems in this anthology is the logical one determined by the progress of Catullus's love affair with Lesbia. The numbers, however, refer to the order of the poems in the manuscripts. 2. A translation into Latin of Sappho's Greek poem *Like the very gods in my sight is he* (see above, p. 532), that reproduces Sappho's metrical scheme (imitated in the English translation).

to your light laughter, which casts such confusion 5
 onto my senses, Lesbia, that when I
 gaze at you merely, all of my well-chosen
 words are forgotten³

as my tongue thickens & a subtle fire
 runs through my body while my ears are deafened 10
 by their own ringing & at once my eyes are
 covered in darkness!

Leisure, Catullus. More than just a nuisance,
 leisure: you riot, overmuch enthusing.
 Fabulous cities & their sometime kings have 15
 died of such leisure.⁴

86

Many find Quintia stunning. I find her attractive:
 tall, "regal," fair in complexion—these points are granted.
 But stunning? No, I deny it: the woman is scarcely venerious,
 there's no spice at all in all the length of her body!
 Now Lesbia is stunning, for Lesbia's beauty is total: 5
 and by that sum all other women are diminished.

87

No other woman can truthfully say she was cherished
 as much as Lesbia was when I was her lover.
 Never, in any such bond, was fidelity greater
 than mine, in my love for you, ever discovered.

109

Darling, we'll both have equal shares in the sweet love you offer,
 and it will endure forever—you assure me.
 O heaven, see to it that she can truly keep this promise,
 that it came from her heart & was sincerely given,
 so that we may spend the rest of our days in this lifelong 5
 union, this undying compact of holy friendship.

3. All . . . *forgotten* is a guess at the sense of a line missing in the original. 4. The final stanza may not belong to this poem; if it does, it is Catullus's addition to his Sapphic original.

83

Lesbia hurls abuse at me in front of her husband:
that fatuous person finds it highly amusing!
Nothing gets through to you, jackass—for silence would signal
that she'd been cured of me, but her barking & bitching
show that not only [have]⁵ I not been forgotten,
—but that this burns her: and so she rants & rages.

5

70

My woman says there is no one whom she'd rather marry
than me, not even Jupiter,⁶ if he came courting.
That's what she says—but what a woman says to a passionate lover
ought to be scribbled on wind, on running water.

72

You used to say that you wished to know only Catullus,
Lesbia, and wouldn't take even Jove before me!
I didn't regard you just as my mistress then: I cherished you
as a father does his sons or his daughters' husbands.
Now that I know you, I burn for you even more fiercely,
though I regard you as almost utterly worthless.
How can that be, you ask? It's because such cruelty forces
lust to assume the shrunken place of affection.

5

85

I hate & love. And if you should ask how I can do both,
I couldn't say; but I feel it, and it shivers me.

75

To such a state have I been brought by your mischief, my Lesbia,
and so completely ruined by my devotion,
that I couldn't think kindly of you if you did the best only,
nor cease to love, even if you should do—everything.

5. Editorial substitution for the translator's *haven't*.
Roman pantheon, corresponding to the Greek Zeus.

6. Jupiter (or Jove) was the supreme god of the

Wretched Catullus! You have to stop this nonsense,
 admit that what you see has ended is over!
 Once there were days which shone for you with rare brightness,
 when you would follow wherever your lady led you,
 the one we once loved as we will love no other; 5
 there was no end in those days to our pleasures,
 when what you wished for was what she also wanted.
 Yes, there were days which shone for you with rare brightness.
 Now she no longer wishes; you mustn't want it,
 you've got to stop chasing her now—cut your losses, 10
 harden your heart & hold out firmly against her.
 Goodbye now, lady. Catullus' heart is hardened,
 he will not look to you nor call against your wishes—
 how you'll regret it when nobody comes calling!
 So much for you, bitch—your life is all behind you! 15
 Now who will come to see you, thinking you lovely?
 Whom will you love now, and whom will you belong to?
 Whom will you kiss? And whose lips will you nibble?
 But *you*, Catullus! *You* must hold out now, firmly!

58

Lesbia, Caelius⁷—yes, our darling,
 yes, *Lesbia*, the Lesbia Catullus
 once loved uniquely, more than any other!
 —now on streetcorners & in wretched alleys
 she shucks the offspring of greathearted Remus.⁸ 5

11⁹

Aurelius & Furius, true comrades,
 whether Catullus penetrates to where in
 outermost India booms the eastern ocean's
 wonderful thunder;

whether he stops with Arabs or Hyrcani,
 Parthian bowmen or nomadic Sagae;¹ 5
 or goes to Egypt, which the Nile so richly
 dyes, overflowing;

even if he should scale the lofty Alps, or
 summon to mind the mightiness of Caesar 10

7. Perhaps the Marcus Caelius Rufus who was one of Clodia's lovers and whom the statesman and orator Cicero defended when she sued him for trying to poison her. 8. Brother of Romulus, founder of Rome; symbol of Rome's greatness. 9. Like poem 51, also in Sapphic meter. 1. These are all peoples on the fringes of the Roman empire (and so in Roman eyes exotic and menacing).

Chinese and Japanese Poetry

The Solitude of Night

By Li Po

Translated By Shigeyoshi Obata

It was at a wine party—
I lay in a drowse, knowing it not.
The blown flowers fell and filled my lap.
When I arose, still drunken,
The birds had all gone to their nests,
And there remained but few of my comrades.
I went along the river—alone in the moonlight.

(circa 750)

Zazen on Ching-t'ing Mountain

By Li Po

Translated By Sam Hamill

The birds have vanished down the sky.
Now the last cloud drains away.
We sit together, the mountain and me,
until only the mountain remains.

A Poem of Changan

By Li Po

My hair had hardly covered my forehead.
I was picking flowers, playing by my door,
When you, my lover, on a bamboo horse,
Came trotting in circles and throwing green plums.
We lived near together on a lane in Ch'ang-kan,
Both of us young and happy-hearted.

...At fourteen I became your wife,
So bashful that I dared not smile,
And I lowered my head toward a dark corner
And would not turn to your thousand calls;
But at fifteen I straightened my brows and laughed,
Learning that no dust could ever seal our love,
That even unto death I would await you by my post
And would never lose heart in the tower of silent watching.

...Then when I was sixteen, you left on a long journey
Through the Gorges of Ch'u-t'ang, of rock and whirling water.
And then came the Fifth-month, more than I could bear,
And I tried to hear the monkeys in your lofty far-off sky.
Your footprints by our door, where I had watched you go,
Were hidden, every one of them, under green moss,
Hidden under moss too deep to sweep away.
And the first autumn wind added fallen leaves.

And now, in the Eighth-month, yellowing butterflies
Hover, two by two, in our west-garden grasses
And, because of all this, my heart is breaking
And I fear for my bright cheeks, lest they fade.

...Oh, at last, when you return through the three Pa districts,
Send me a message home ahead!
And I will come and meet you and will never mind the distance,
All the way to Chang-feng Sha.

Po Chu i
(all circa 800)

Madly Singing in the Mountains

There is no one among men that has not a special failing
And my failing consists in writing verses.
I have broken away from the thousand ties of life;
But this infirmity still remains behind.
Each time that I look at a fine landscape,
Each time that I meet a loved friend,
I raise my voice and recite a stanza of poetry
And marvel as though a god had crossed my path.
Ever since the day I was banished to Hsun-yang
Half my time I have lived among the hills.
And often, when I have finished a new poem,
Alone I climb the road to the Eastern Rock.
I lean my body on the banks of white Stone;
I pull down with my hands a green cassia branch.
My mad singing startles the valley and hills;
The apes and birds all come to peep.
Fearing to become a laughing-stock to the world,
I choose a place that is unfrequented by men.

Rising Late
Translated by David Hinton

Birds are calling in courtyard trees
and sunlight's bright in the eaves,

but I'm old, my laziness perfected,
and now it's cold I rise even later.

It's my nature: quilts thick or thin,
pillows high or low. They suit me:

spirit at peace, body safe and warm
How many can savor such things?

Once I've slept enough, I just sit
looking up, no thoughts anywhere-

as if our senses had never opened
and our limbs were long forgotten.

I think back to someone up early
in Ch'ang-an, clothes frost-stained.

He and I, each whole and sufficient-
who can say which is nothing now?

Writing Again On The Same Theme
Translated by Arthur Waley

The sun's high
I've slept enough
still too lazy to get up;
in a little room
quilts piled on
I'm not afraid of the cold.
The bell of the Temple of Bequeathed Love
I prop up my pillow to listen;
snow on Incense Burner Peak
rolling up the blind, I look at it.
K'uang's Mount Lu
a place for running away from fame;
marshal
a fitting post to spend old age in.
Mind peaceful
body at rest
this is where I belong.
Why should I always think of Ch'ang-an as home?

After Getting Drunk, Becoming Sober in the Night

Our party scattered at yellow dusk and I came home to bed;
I woke at midnight and went for a walk, leaning heavily on a friend.
As I lay on my pillow my vinous complexion, soothed by sleep, grew sober;
In front of the tower the ocean moon, accompanying the tide, had risen.
The swallows, about to return to the beams, went back to roost again;
The candle at my window, just going out, suddenly revived its light.
All the time till dawn came, still my thoughts were muddled;
And in my ears something sounded like the music of flutes and strings.

「截树」白居易
种树当前轩，树高柯叶繁。惜哉远山色，隐此蒙笼间。
一朝持斧斤，手自截其端。万叶落头上，千峰来面前。
忽似决云雾，豁达睹青天。又如所念人，久别一款颜。
始有清风至，稍见飞鸟还。开怀东南望，目远心辽然。
人各有偏好，物莫能两全。岂不爱柔条，不如见青山。

PRUNING TREES

Trees growing — right in front of my window;
The trees are high and the leaves grow thick.

Sad alas! the distant mountain view
Obscured by this, dimly shows between.
One morning I took knife and axe ;
With my own hand I lopped the branches off.
Ten thousand leaves fall about my head ;
A thousand hills came before my eyes.
Suddenly, as when clouds or mists break
And straight through, the blue sky appears.
Again, like the face of a friend one has loved
Seen at last after an age of parting.
First there came a gentle wind blowing ;
One by one the birds flew back to the tree.
To ease my mind I gazed to the South East;
As my eyes wandered, my thoughts went far away.
Of men there is none that has not some preference :
Of things there is none but mixes good with ill.
It was not that I did not love the tender branches;
But better still, — to see the green hills!

Buson

on the one ton temple bell
a moon-moth, folded into sleep,
sits still.

Japan
By Billy Collins

Today I pass the time reading
a favorite haiku,
saying the few words over and over.
It feels like eating
the same small, perfect grape
again and again.
I walk through the house reciting it
and leave its letters falling
through the air of every room.
I stand by the big silence of the piano and say it.
I say it in front of a painting of the sea.
I tap out its rhythm on an empty shelf.
I listen to myself saying it,
then I say it without listening,
then I hear it without saying it.
And when the dog looks up at me,
I kneel down on the floor
and whisper it into each of his long white ears.
It's the one about the one-ton temple bell
with the moth sleeping on its surface,
and every time I say it, I feel the excruciating
pressure of the moth
on the surface of the iron bell.

When I say it at the window,
the bell is the world
and I am the moth resting there.
When I say it at the mirror,
I am the heavy bell
and the moth is life with its papery wings.
And later, when I say it to you in the dark,
you are the bell,
and I am the tongue of the bell, ringing you,
and the moth has flown
from its line
and moves like a hinge in the air above our bed.