

Is This Therapy?:
Literary Self-Reflection and Women's Voices
in Sappho, Catullus, and Ovid

By

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ABSTRACT

This study considers the intersection of women's voices and literary self-reflection in the works of Sappho, Catullus, and Ovid. My chosen textual range includes both authentic and manufactured female voices to interrogate the gendered implications of publishing intimate poetry. Much of this project involves turning assumptions on their heads: I broaden our expectations of personal voice and its aesthetics, contribute to our understanding of Sappho's stylistic influences on later poets, and suggest an alternative way of reading epistolary literature as inherently self-reflective. Elements of repetition and vision collide to create and dwell upon literary memories within the Sapphic verse that is at times emulated and at times ignored by her Roman imitators, who find in the lyric poet an opportunity for vulnerability. The gendered dynamics of literary self-reflection emerge as equally illuminating of both women's and men's voices. While founded in the texts of antiquity, this study engages with personal voice as a timeless element of human expression.

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INTRODUCTION: φαίνεται μοι

It seemed to me a reasonable undertaking for this project to attempt a comprehensive study of the intersections of women's voices and self-reflective writing in ancient Greek and Roman literature. Of course, that was overly ambitious. This topic is far-reaching and complex, with each enlightening conclusion revealing an expanse of unexplored possibilities. The study that follows begins to consider these intersections, with a focus on literary self-reflection in select texts from Sappho, Catullus, and Ovid and with particular attention paid to the gendered dynamics within.

Women's voices are a relatively rare occurrence in what survives of ancient literature, which is almost entirely authored by men. What little we have from female authors is often contested due to the perceived unlikelihood of ancient women being capable of writing such stylistically complex compositions or of addressing such scandalous subjects.¹ The most resilient against these charges is Sappho, whose fragmented extant corpus remains our most substantial and stable example of an ancient Mediterranean woman's literary perspective. The Sapphic voice is therefore invaluable in assessing the authenticity and implications of the other type of "women's voices," those written by men. It is crucial to remember that the context Sappho embodies is entirely her own and cannot be mapped onto that of every other ancient female voice, whether historical or fictional. However, the Sapphic corpus seemed to me a good place to begin my investigation of not only ancient women's voices, but also the personal voice of self-reflection.

Even if Sappho is most well-known for the apparent unlikelihood of her gender and sexuality, the most recognizable aspect of her poetry is its intimacy and vulnerability. These two

¹ Keith 2006.

elements, Sappho's identity and her style, have historically been overly conflated, with the latter viewed as merely a means of figuring out "what" Sappho was. This is both a dismissal of the aesthetics of Sapphic verse and an oversimplification of what a female personal voice might suggest. While Sappho's self-reflective voice has literary value beyond what it may or may not reveal about her as a woman, we cannot separate her voice from her identity nor ignore the intersection of these within society. However, I approach each text discussed here with the same mindfulness on this matter; if Sappho's gender informs how we consider her voice and interpret it within her context, the myriad *male* voices of Catullus and Ovid must play a similar role in our investigation. After all, gender should not only be a factor when it pertains to women's writing. These male authors' use of personal voice is also tied up in their identities and positionalities, which grows even more complex as they imitate and appropriate women's voices in various ways.

The two main goals of this study are to re-examine how we consider personal voice in ancient literature and to explore the gendered dynamics of self-reflection within men's writing. I pursue both by tracing the complexities of Sappho's literary self-reflection from her own verses to its reception in the poetry of Catullus and Ovid. Chapter 1 re-considers assumptions surrounding personal voice in literature and expands our considerations of its purposes. I employ several case studies to demonstrate previous preoccupations with historicity and work with both ancient and modern models to reveal the futility of such endeavors. The personal connections I highlight here reinforce my argument that it is the relatability of the literary personal voice and of Sappho's poetry that is most valuable, rather than what it may tell us about the poet herself. I progress from theory to textual analysis as I define the tangible poetics of self-reflection, my chosen aspect of personal voice, within Sappho's corpus. Some verbs explicitly suggest mindful

meditation, while established models of vision and memory help illuminate the subtle markers of Sapphic self-reflection. The gaze operates as a mode of memorialization, serving as both the originating precursor and the eventual manifestation of this rumination. Temporal shifts within poems reinforce the repeated return to such memories. The speakers of these poems demonstrate a sophisticated self-reflective aesthetic oft overlooked in favor of Sappho's theme.

Chapter 2 observes a Catullus mindful of these Sapphic poetics of self-reflection as he translates and adapts her lyric to Latin. He both maintains and emphasizes the elements of vision and repetition present in the original Greek, while adding the self-directed questioning that is so prevalent through Catullus' corpus. I observe additional moments of Sapphic-inspired self-reflection in other poems less explicitly influenced by her. It is through these explorations of identity that Ovid enters the picture. While writing his own version of Sappho in *Heroides* 15, Ovid draws from these Catullan moments of self-reflection rather than Sappho's own poetic ruminations. What results is a "Sappho" concerned with Roman, male identity and an ultimate reliance on the female personal voice for masculine self-reflection taking place in the public literary sphere. Chapter 2 closes with a consideration of how societal Otherness plays into the gendered appropriation of voice that I observe in Catullus and Ovid, who both benefit from Sappho's identity and artistry.

A different, though still gender-concerned, Ovid emerges from the self-reflections of the other *Heroides*, which I explore in Chapter 3. Rather than ruminating on issues of male identity through a constructed historical woman, Ovid crafts self-directed, self-reflective letters from the personae of mythological women. I return to theory as I illustrate how this epistolary therapy functions and hinges on expectations of readership, looking to the self-didactic nature of Horace's philosophical letters. Many of the markers of self-reflection that I observe in *Heroides*

5 and 17 (Oenone and Helen to Paris, respectively), appropriate for their shared narrative context and dramatically contrasted positionalities, seem similar to those observed in Sappho's poetry. In addition to direct statements of expectation and varied types of questions, vision emerges as particularly signifying of the heroines' self-reflection. While Oenone maintains a conversation with herself throughout the entirety of her letter, Helen seems to shift her purpose at the midpoint, redirecting her epistolary perspective inward. Helen's presence in Oenone's letter further contrasts the two women and fosters additional self-reflection. The sight of Helen prompts an acute moment of self-interrogation and self-judgment from Oenone, who creates a mirrored image of herself in the other woman.

These explorations of gendered self-reflection highlight the abundance of interpretive options and vast potentiality of insights we gain when we reconsider personal voice. I assert and embrace the complexity of this literary technique, which I find to be expansive for the same reasons others have found it deceptive and limiting. My treatment of Sappho's self-reflection emphasizes aesthetics over theme as it explores her influence on later poets. While I see the Sapphic lovers and the Ovidian heroines engaging in varied manifestations of bittersweet, or just bitter, remembering, I also question what it means for a male author to use a female voice for introspection. Even if Catullus and Ovid do not reveal their personal anxieties through their poetic explorations of identity, we still see a feminine context to their literary self-reflections. My conclusions reinforce the too-often forgotten truth that a gender-critical lens is not just about studying women.

I

A PERSONAL SAPPHO

Oh my god my honey,
I think about it all the time.
Evenings dark but sunny,
play back across my mind.
—Tall Heights, “Backwards and Forwards”

RE-DEFINING “PERSONAL” VOICE

When beginning this project, I conceptualized “personal voice” as a rather straightforward idea: a person writes about emotions or events from their life and, due to the nature of human experience, their textual creation resonates with readers. First encountering Sappho with this mindset, I was, as Pam Gordon puts it, “the novice reader of Sappho who reads with her heart,” marveling at the familiar feelings I saw reflected in her poems.² Many before me have likewise identified a clearly personal, relatable voice in Sappho. This sort of connection has often been the starting point of my research; seeing myself in some subtle aspect of the text sparks whatever interpretation I end up making. While this has happened while working with quite a variety of genres, I expected the study of personal voice and the ancient authors who use it to supply a wealth of such opportunities. My initial interactions with Sappho’s poetry were exactly as I expected, though I was unaware of the difficulty scholars have in making sense of it.

I want to take a moment to briefly discuss the idea of personal voice in a modern context, a setting to which I will return later in this section. I have long recognized my tendency of finding personal meaning in ancient texts, often among fears that I therefore must be “doing research wrong.” After all, must it not be dangerously naïve to utilize personal insights in academic work? How can a gut feeling I have, based on my human experience, possibly be

² Gordon 2002, xi.

pursued as a legitimate or valid theory? We are so often encouraged to research from a place of pretended objectivity and indifference, an impossibility inherent to the very nature of the humanities. How can we, and why should we, take the humanity out of it? That is not to say that we can let our personal contexts, biases, and inescapable subjectivities obscure our academic judgment, but that we will miss valuable and worthwhile opportunities, for both academic and personal development, if we never allow our own personal insights and voices into our research.³ In this case, my musings about engaging my academic personal voice have given me insights into interpreting textual personal voice.

It is from this mindset of cautious inspiration that I came to think about self-reflection in Sappho, only to find an area of study marked by mutually exclusive dichotomies, many of which revolve around the question of personal voice. It perplexes me that Sappho must be either a soloist or choral performer, that we can either glean a cohesive biography or learn nothing of the historic Sappho, or that Sappho must be writing either entirely from the imagination or entirely from experience. While many of these theories involve fascinating questions, I do not find the idea of answering them possible or worthwhile. We cannot ever know the historic Sappho; I do not think we can really “know” anyone, despite the directive to “know oneself.”⁴ Of course, the intimate nature of the fragments ascribed to Sappho make that hopeless endeavor dangerously tempting, especially if we recognize our unknowable selves in her poetry. However, these questions are caught up with the idea of personal voice and many scholars find their resulting solutions antagonistic to reading Sappho’s fragments as personal poetry. It seems that the

³ Gordon 2002, xi; Rabinowitz 2001. I take as inspiration Bernadette Brooten’s 1985 suggestion that we utilize our imaginations while reconstructing early Christian women’s history. She eloquently defends the need to seek out non-traditional sources for investigating what she deems is equivalent to prehistory in its documentation and rejects the notion that such methodology would become “free-flowing fantasy” (66–69). While I am not investigating the historical Sappho (quite the opposite), I see in Brooten’s argument an open-mindedness and willingness to look outside the normative limitations of academic research. Also see Parks 2019, 52.

⁴ Pausanias 10.24.1.

dichotomy prevalent in the tone of academic research and writing has a parallel in academic interpretation, where harsh boundaries obscure the possibility of coexistence.

While the historical trend of seeing Sappho directly reflected in her poetry has admittedly trusted too much in a personal voice, I have noticed that other studies push too far in the other direction. Moreover, some of these arguments, in distancing Sappho's poetry from a modern construction of personal voice and its associated assumptions, make other assumptions that problematize their conclusions. I will discuss the evidence of two such studies, those of Judith Hallett and André Lardinois, that have argued against a personal voice for Sappho.⁵ Each confronts the assumption that Sappho's poetry is not only intimate but also autobiographical and offers worthwhile challenges to this autobiographical reading. However logical, I argue that Hallett and Lardinois are confined by other modern assumptions that obscure the possibility of finding in Sappho what I will call a "generic," or literary, personal voice.

I begin with Hallett's 1979 paper examining the social context of Sappho, in which she argues against seeing an autobiographical (and subsequently lesbian) personal voice in Sappho's poetry. Instead, she suggests that the personal, intimate voice we find in Sappho is part of a tradition in educating young women unfamiliar with the physical realities of marriage and is not any indication of Sappho's romantic or sexual relationships with other women. Hallett's criticism of the field's preoccupation with Sappho's sexuality is a valid caution against reading the poems as purely autobiographical, as this obsession with the poet often obscures the art itself.⁶ However, in denying that we can see the historical Sappho in the poetic persona, Hallett makes other assumptions about the social context of Sappho as poet. The Sappho who teaches

⁵ Hallett 1979; Lardinois 2021.

⁶ Echoed in Mueller 2021, who "traces the destabilising, 'queer affect' of Sappho's work" regardless of the poet's unknowable sexuality (37).

young women about sex and physical love must be older and sexually experienced, something that has been historically assumed from the vividness of the poems. Hallett tries to separate her reading from such autobiographical assumptions but does not explain how we can assume a sexually knowledgeable Sappho, if not from the poetry itself. Of course, at times it seems impossible to not see such experience in Sappho's verses, which becomes evidence of the murky boundaries between poet and persona that come along with personal voice. I argue that this is not a fog that we can fully dissipate, but we need to be aware of when, in avoiding problematic assumptions, we resort to relying on others.⁷

Lardinois' contribution to the 2021 *Cambridge Companion to Sappho* similarly privileges certain assumptions to disprove others, simply choosing an alternative that works in neither an ancient nor a modern context. Like the historical preoccupation with Sappho's sexuality that Hallett identifies, Lardinois points out another way in which scholarship has treated Sappho differently than her contemporaries in insisting on an autobiographical personal voice. Despite efforts to distinguish other poets from their textual personas, the historical preference for reading Sappho with the goal of learning about the poet herself does her poetry a disservice that the male lyric poets escape. I agree that these preoccupations are distractions and that our efforts are better spent exploring the effects of a textual personal voice on the reader instead of what it can tell us about the poet.⁸ However, Lardinois reminds us of a reality that Hallett misses, that "Sappho's

⁷ Hallett also maps male models of sexual education and competition onto those of women. While this application is not directly involved in the concept of personal voice, it is another case of using one unfit assumption to resolve another.

⁸ I am aware of how the situation surrounding Sappho is inherently different from those of her contemporaries. Not only is she one of few women from which we have any large amount of extant literature, an identity that threatens the historical privileging of male authorship, but she has also occupied a role of ancient queer representation to many people. Like her gender, her sexuality has also been targeted by those unwilling to broaden the canon and set on excluding a portion of humanity from both antiquity and modernity. Due to their abundance, ancient male authors, even with a range of sexualities, predictably do not draw such fascination. This reality appeared most clear to me when trying to explain to my aunt why people get so upset, rightfully or not, about Sappho.

personal experiences influenced her poetry (they influence the work of any artist), but that is different from saying that her poetry is about her personal experiences.”⁹ We can entertain the idea that the historical Sappho’s life, her experiences and emotions, emerge in her poetry as generic inspiration for writing about humanity. This point cannot be dismissed just because it is also a modern reality, as we see every living artist engaging with some aspect of their lived experience for inspiration. We can hold these ideas of personal narrative and inspired fiction simultaneously when considering Sappho’s, or any other writer’s, use of personal voice.

Like Hallett’s argument, Lardinois fails to disengage from reading Sappho herself even as he attempts to minimize the possibility of an autobiographically personal voice. He considers elements of Sappho’s poems that he identifies as reasons why we cannot read them as autobiography but does not offer much in terms of what other poetic effect they may have. It is here where I see a reliance on assumptions that I argue are based in modernity (as there is no ancient evidence provided) but do not actually hold true in modernity. Alongside considering the various speakers and occasions in Sappho’s corpus, Lardinois looks closely at how the presence or absence of names can inform our biographical understanding of an individual poem. He utilizes this technique both in what he calls “love songs” and “family songs.” For example, when considering fr. 1, Lardinois argues that “the fictional character of the song is clear because the woman whom ‘Sappho’ loves is not named: this makes the poem highly ineffective as a prayer, but works well for a song, making it easier to perform on different occasions.”¹⁰ The absence of the beloved’s name is indeed notable when considering the poem’s magical context, but I would argue it holds less power over the personal, or even autobiographical, nature of the poem.

Lardinois does not supply ancient evidence for why we should read the omission of a name as a

⁹ Lardinois 2021, 163.

¹⁰ Lardinois 2021, 168; he makes a similar argument for fr. 31 and the “Cypris Poem” (170).

marker of fiction in Sappho's poetic context, so I can only assume that his argument is based on modern aesthetics and conventions (though this is problematic as well, as I shall discuss in the following pages). It is far more plausible and worthwhile to consider Sappho's authorial choice to omit the name of the beloved, whether historical or fictitious, and what bearing that holds upon stylistic interpretation or the ancient reader's reception of the poem.

In a parallel manner, Lardinois interrogates an autobiographical reading of the Brothers Poem, in which Sappho provides names for the men whom the unnamed speaker calls brothers. Here Lardinois seems to struggle with his theory of names: "If Charaxus and Larichus were Sappho's real brothers, we must assume that Sappho is talking about personal experience. But were [they] her real brothers? They could be fictional characters."¹¹ He goes on to discuss why he doubts that this case of naming indicates an autobiographical narrative due to the unlikelihood of Sappho revealing such intimate, even embarrassing, familial details in a public or semi-public setting.¹² No matter how reasonable this conclusion sounds, it is still based on conjecture that requires we try to piece together the historical Sappho's life. We can see how daunting this task is in Lardinois' working out of fr. 1 and the Brothers Poem, from which he does not offer a cohesive theory of how naming functions in Sappho's poetry. Moreover, his conclusions rely on what he presents as universal truth about the personal voice, that the presence or absence of names has at least *some* bearing on whether the historical poet writes about their own experience. I argue that this is not only a modern assumption, but also an assumption that does not even work in modernity and therefore cannot be applied to Sappho's poetry or the personal voice in general.

To demonstrate this in a less theoretical setting than the distant and unknowable Sappho, we can look at how naming conventions function in a modern example of songwriting. Of

¹¹ Lardinois 2021, 172.

¹² Lardinois 2021, 172–173.

course, ancient Greek lyric poetry and modern popular music have their fair share of differences; however, while we must avoid total projectionism of modern concepts onto ancient works, the relationship here is overwhelming. It is worthwhile to remember that Sappho's poems were, in fact, songs, performed both by the original poet herself and likely by imitators, the original "cover artists," we could say. Therefore, I will consider a modern singer/songwriter who is known particularly for her personal *and* autobiographical lyrics. Taylor Swift's discography is filled with albums dedicated to discrete periods of her life, with a great majority of her songs linked to individual relationships and experiences. A product of modern media and fascination with celebrity figures, both tabloids and fans have pieced together subtle clues hidden in Swift's lyrics to determine the autobiographical truth behind each song.¹³ Unlike with Sappho, we can know whether some of these things happened; sometimes the "clue" is even a name in a song title.¹⁴ Swift name-drops often in her song-writing, with the individuals named often being well-known figures with established connections to Swift herself. When the identity of a named character in her songs is not obvious, there has never been a strong reason to doubt that Swift wrote from personal experience; rather, listeners assume this is simply an unidentified experience and person from her past.

Thus far, Swift's songs work as evidence that Lardinois is correct in linking specific names to autobiography; their presence supplies at least the potential for grounding a song's narrative in the perceived reality of Swift's life. However, her two most recent albums engage in storytelling in a way that dramatically differs from her first seven. In the booklet accompaniment to *folklore*, Swift writes, "I found myself not only writing my own stories, but also writing about

¹³ Swift herself engages in this dynamic, leaving clues in the song lyrics printed inside the albums' booklets. Various letters in the lyrics are capitalized, seemingly at random, but, when linked together, form a coded message that provides an additional, usually also cryptic, clue about the meaning or inspiration of the song.

¹⁴ "Dear John," from *Speak Now*.

or from the perspective of people I've never met, people I've known, or those I wish I hadn't. [...] The lines between fantasy and reality blur and the boundaries between truth and fiction become almost indiscernible.”¹⁵ Here is where my research benefits from my own personal insight and voice. To me, as someone familiar with Swift's earlier discography, these songs did not seem like fiction; I listened to the album before reading her explanation and was left wondering, “when did this happen to her?” The evocative and emotive power of her personal voice becomes apparent when one learns that it is *not* autobiographical but *seems* to be. This effect emerges even more dramatically since we know with certainty that the narratives and specific reactions detailed in these songs were not Swift's lived experience; there is no room for doubt when Swift sings through the eyes of a war veteran or hospital nurse.¹⁶ Whereas with Sappho we can only ever hypothesize on the autobiographical nature of her songs, with Swift's *folklore* and *evermore*, we know.

The emerging paradox within fictionalized personal voice becomes more apparent when we consider songs from *folklore* with named characters. The album's tripartite story composed of the songs “cardigan,” “betty,” and “august” is told from three different perspectives. Swift constructs a narrative revolving around these people, two of whom are given names in the songs. The personal voice in these stories is marked by use of first- and second-person perspectives, ruminations on emotions and memories, and musings about mistakes and universal truths, all elements also present in Sappho's poetry. Swift's style of hyper-specific narrative detail that contributes to the strong autobiographical nature of her earlier work evokes the same level of convincing intimacy and reality in these fictional narratives. Moreover, the voices of James and Betty hold just as much authority in describing their subtle emotions and internal conflicts as the

¹⁵ Swift 2020, who continues this songwriting model with her subsequent album, *evermore*.

¹⁶ “Epiphany,” from *folklore* (Swift 2020).

unnamed woman of “august.”¹⁷ These three people do not seem any less real than when Swift sings about the Stephen or John of earlier albums.¹⁸ Connecting poetic naming to historical reality is possible at times with figures such as Taylor Swift because they are knowable, but *folklore* demonstrates that this is not the rule.

Even when trying to distance ourselves from projecting modernity onto the past, the closeness and seeming familiarity of personal voice make it easy to accidentally do so. When we witness Sappho naming a lover, brothers, or even herself in her songs, we cannot pretend to know that this separates historical from fictional narrative. Lardinois encounters this idea in his discussion of the Brothers Poem, but I would argue that we do not need to interrogate the propriety of Sappho publicly scolding her family for the sake of the historical figures themselves. We *cannot* know whether Charaxus and Larichus were her real brothers, but we *can* consider the personal voice she employs as a conceptual tool with which to read Sappho’s poetry, rather than try to read her.¹⁹ Taylor Swift has not been so successful simply because she reveals her life to listeners; otherwise, tabloids and social media would be a far easier way to do so. It is the universality and even ordinary nature of the personal voice employed, regardless of its autobiographical “authenticity,” that has secured Swift’s loyal fanbase. As Tim Whitmarsh poignantly writes, “there are no general truths about human nature that do not manifest themselves in personal experience”; Swift and Sappho simply capitalize on its unifying quality.²⁰ Considering this “generic” personal voice in contrast to an autobiographical one reconciles the

¹⁷ These songs also provide a good example of how we can consider the authorial choice to include or omit a name as more than just a marker of reality or fiction. Withholding the name of the third figure, from whose perspective “august” is sung, diminishes their power in the fictional love-triangle.

¹⁸ I am not aware of any conclusive identifications of the named figure in “Hey Stephen,” from *Fearless (Taylor’s Version)* (Swift 2021), but *Speak Now*’s “Dear John” references the relationship between Swift and John Mayer (Swift 2010).

¹⁹ See Mueller 2021 for a similar plea for reading queerness in Sappho’s poetry.

²⁰ Whitmarsh 2018, 150.

instinct to “read Sappho with the heart” with the tempering awareness of potential differences between poet and poetic persona.

We can view personal voice, along with all its relatable intimacy and introspection, as an author’s literary tool with which we can engage as we do any other literary device. As discussed earlier, the inspiration for this type of literary voice likely comes from real experiences and emotions; however, the direct link between art and inspiration can vary. The generic, or literary, personal voice capitalizes on the universality of human experience and emotion. It contains all the features of an autobiographical personal voice, but without the need to be based in this factual historicity.²¹ Rather, it may or may not be loosely based on an artist’s prior experiences, with the true artistry being the recreation of real or imagined emotions in the work and in the audience. This loss of autobiography in personal voice does not constitute a loss of our personal connection to it; the timeless jolt of recognition when reading Sappho’s fragments persists even when we cannot know whether the author herself shared our emotional experiences. After all, it was such a jolt of familiarity that sparked my first musings on literary personal voice, specifically the dynamics of textual self-reflection in Ovid’s *Heroides*. The nature of that particular text even presupposes a fictional personal voice, written by a Roman man through the eyes of a mythological woman. However, the pain, anger, and uncertainty characterizing the heroines’ letters are not any less convincing with this knowledge. There are further dynamics at play in that particular manifestation of literary personal voice, all of which affect how we interpret the work as a whole, but I will explore those in a later chapter.

²¹ Power 2019 argues for a similar methodology when coining “parachordal monody.” He argues that we may never know the performed realities of Sappho’s poetry and that it is therefore far more worthwhile and interesting to explore the literary effect of monodic or choral elements.

Despite this extensive consideration of the external dynamics of literary personal voice, we have not yet considered much of what it looks like, especially in Sappho's poetry. With both the Sapphic corpus and the myriad aspects of personal voice being quite large, I will focus the remainder of this project on literary self-reflection, the ruminating component of personal voice, and those poems that directly engage with it. In this and the next chapter, I interrogate how self-reflection emerges in a distinctly Sapphic aesthetic, both through Sappho herself and the Roman poets she influences. Additionally, in lieu of trying to initially describe what self-reflection is or how it manifests in literature, I will offer only a simple definition before exploring its components and complexities through study of the poetry. I will also refer to self-reflection by other terms, namely introspection, rumination, and meditation. Each has slightly different connotations, but I consider them all as subcategories of a consistent, inward view.

SAPPHIC SELF-REFLECTION: VISION AND MEMORY

Literary self-reflection can manifest in various ways and with a wide range of clarity. In its most basic sense, self-reflection is an exploration of things pertaining to oneself, whether they are thoughts, emotions, and past or future actions. It is in this reliance on the mind and its inner workings that the expression of self-reflection is intrinsically tied to personal voice and its affected intimacy. For the same reason, it may seem difficult to identify what textual introspection would look like; after all, we often do not encounter self-reflection outside of our own heads, or perhaps one-sided conversations with a friend. Like these internal or pseudo-dialogic manifestations, a textual speaker may directly refer to reflective thinking or they might subconsciously reveal their meditative mind. I have identified several markers of self-reflection

within this range that I will use throughout this chapter and those following, beginning with one of the most celebrated poems of Sappho.

At the end of fr. 1, Sappho classifies the poem and complaint to Aphrodite as a site of self-reflection (25–26): ἔλθε μοι καὶ νῦν, χαλέπαν δὲ λῦσον / ἐκ μερίμναν (“Come to me now, and release me from my painful meditating”).²² The verb μεριμνάω evokes this quality of rumination, translated as to “care for, be anxious about, meditate upon” (*LSJ* s.v.). Each of these options conveys a sense of repetitive thinking over a memory or emotion, which is further characterized as “painful.” Coming at the end of a poem in which Sappho, through both her own poetic voice and that of the supplicated Aphrodite, laments her relentless, maddening tendency to love, the participle retroactively describes the poem’s earlier contents, infusing its entirety with a meditative quality.

Sappho’s and Aphrodite’s earlier remarks reinforce this idea of repetition, as both reveal that Sappho, at least the version in this poem, has found herself in a similar situation before. The speaker addresses the goddess (fr. 1.15–20):

ἦρε’ ὅττι δηῦτε πέπονθα κῶττι
δηῦτε κάλημμι
κῶττι μοι μάλιστα θέλω γένεσθαι
μαινόλαι θύμωι· τίνα δηῦτε πείθω
σάγην ἐς σὰν φιλότατα; τίς σ’, ὧ
Ψάπφ’, ἀδικήσι;²³

You ask what again I have suffered,
for what again I cry out,
what I most want to happen to me
in my maddened heart. “Whom must I again persuade
to follow you into your love? Who,
O Sappho, wrongs you?”

²² For Sappho’s Greek text, I follow Voigt 1971, unless otherwise noted. All translations from Greek and Latin are my own.

²³ This is one of the few times that the poet Sappho names herself as the speaker of her poem. However, I will not be directly considering it outside of its evocation of generic personal voice, as I am focusing on self-reflection rather than literary personal voice in general.

Aphrodite asks both *what* has happened to Sappho and *who* has caused her this grief. The δηῦτε that the speaker introduces, which the goddess then echoes, reveals that they both recall Sappho's prior loves, presumably unrequited. The poem itself engages in repetition, much like the circularity of the anxious meditating mind. At the least, these sources of grief become present in the speaker's mind by the halfway point of the poem, though we can guess that they have haunted her from the first moment of writing and even before. The poet speaker has turned to her craft from a mindset of rumination over prior and future events, the poem joining her mind as a site for self-reflection.

Heartbreak past, present, and future is an appropriate theme for meditation. Perhaps equally iconic is the subject of fr. 58B, the inevitability of growing old. This poem is perfect for my question for the very same reason it has disappointed other scholars of Sappho: its ordinariness. In comparison to the hymnic and mysterious fr. 1, fr. 58 could seem boring.²⁴ An unnamed speaker laments her old age to a group of children, before referencing the mythic example of Tithonus. While this poem has produced significant discourse over Sappho's identity as instructor or chorus leader due to the παῖδες addressed in the first line, I am far more interested in its participation in literary self-reflection, regardless of the dynamics of biographical insights.²⁵

As in fr. 1, the speaker marks her meditations and classifies the verses as such with a verbal description, in this case the far more ordinary στεναχίζω of line 7. While “to wail” or “to lament” (*LSJ* s.v.) seems generically appropriate to a wide range of grievances, it lacks the meditation inherent to the definition of μεριμνάω. However, the greater context of the line in

²⁴ See Janko 2017, 267, who cites the original (but no longer accessible) 2005 report by S.P. Stothard on the TLS blog.

²⁵ See Ladianou 2016, 362ff.

which it is found suggests that this lamentation is of a self-reflective nature (fr. 58B.7): τα στεναχίζω θαμέως· ἀλλὰ τί κεν ποεῖην; (“I lament these things often. But what can I do?”)²⁶ “These things” (τα) must refer to the preceding lines, which, despite the lacunae, clearly describe her aging body (3–6). Therefore, while στεναχίζω is not inherently meditative, its reference to concerns already voiced implies a degree of repetition. The speaker laments her aged skin, graying hair, heavy heart, and rigid limbs once in lines 3–6 by naming the symptoms themselves and again in line 7 by naming her response. The adverb θαμέως (“often”) reinforces this idea through its direct invocation of repetition: this poem is not the only time she has ruminated on her old age.

The question following this statement in line 7 further marks the self-reflective nature of the poem.²⁷ While rhetorical in the sense that she does not expect a reply from someone else, we can also imagine the speaker asking this question of herself. Instead of a throwaway literary device, the question emerges in the context of her frequent lamentations as a significant moment of hesitation, a stillness in the circular repetition of her rumination. Even though this Sappho knows the impossibility of agelessness, she dwells for just a beat on the possibility that there is something she can do, some futurity upon which to meditate. She follows up her own inquiry with a dismissal of any possible solution (8), before proceeding to a demonstrative example from mythology (9–12).

²⁶ For the Greek of Sappho’s fr. 58B, I follow Budelmann 2018. The use of στεναχίζω for self-reflective lamentation is also supported by its use in the *Odyssey*. This is the verb Odysseus uses when, after weeping upon hearing Demodocus’ song, he begins to tell the Phaeacians of his travels (*Od.* 9.12–13): σοὶ δ’ ἐμὰ κήδεα θυμὸς ἐπετρέπτετο στονόεντα / εἴρεσθ’, ὄφρ’ ἔτι μᾶλλον ὀδυρόμενος στεναχίζω (“But my heart is turned by you to stirring up pains, you ask, so that still more I mourn and lament.”) He suggests that his “lamenting” (στεναχίζω) will be a direct cause of revisiting and spending time with old memories.

²⁷ See Budelmann 2018, 150n7–8 for a similar reading of this line.

The rhetorical question of fr. 58B, though perhaps not a conscious marker on the part of the speaker, creates a relatively linear path to self-reflection. When we turn to fr. 31, however, we will see an earlier and more nuanced stage in this process. For this marker of self-reflection, I will work from Joan DeJean’s theory of the female gaze, which she explores in part through Sappho’s fr. 31. DeJean suggests that, in addition to disrupting the model of the male erotic gaze and desire, “Sappho stages the gaze as an act of memorialization.”²⁸ Where the male gaze constructs an image of the desired for the sake of objectification, the Sapphic gaze works to fix that image in her memory. DeJean uses the poem’s persistent present sense to strengthen this argument, while cautioning against reading the immediacy as impulsivity (fr. 31.1–8):

<p>φαίνεται μοι κῆνος ἴσος θεοῖσιν ἔμμεν’ ὄνηρ, ὅστις ἐνάντιός τοι ἰσδάνει καὶ πλάσιον ἄδῃ φωνεί- σας ὑπακούει καὶ γελαίσας ἰμέροεν, τό μ’ ἦ μὰν καρδίαν ἐν στήθεσιν ἐπτόαισεν, ὥς γὰρ <ἔς> σ’ ἴδω βρόχε’ ὥς με φώνη- σ’ οὐδὲν ἔτ’ εἴκει</p>	<p>He seems to me equal to gods, that one the man, whoever opposite you sits and closely listens to your sweet speaking and lovely laughing, which, oh, it stirs the heart in my chest, for as soon as I see you, even for a moment, no speaking remains in me</p>
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Sappho begins with such immediacy that the tense of the first verbs flows through the rest of the poem, including the moment of the speaker’s first “seeing.” The gnomic aspect of the aorist ἴδω in line 7, along with the temporal influence of the opening stanza, transports that verb out of the past and into the present.²⁹ This present sense grounds the speaker in the moment described, not from a place of control or lack thereof, but rather creating a permanent visual memory to which she can return. DeJean argues that “Sappho’s use of the present stretches the boundaries of that tense: she packs into ‘I see’ both a present of repetition—‘each time that I see you’—and a present of memorialization—‘the minute I catch a glimpse of you my desire comes back to me in

²⁸ DeJean 1988, 39.

²⁹ Edwards 1989, 594 and Greene 1999, 10 both see a similar effect in the mood of ἴδω and its “iterative” and “generalizing” force, respectively.

full force.’ Sappho uses the gaze to evoke not the instant of desire but the recreation of an erotic association that no longer exists, and the duration, the past stability of that relationship.”³⁰

The repetition and recreation present in DeJean’s theory of the Sapphic gaze also work as components of self-reflection. We saw Sappho activate the former in fr. 1 very literally, through the repeated use of the internally repetitive $\delta\eta\tilde{\upsilon}\tau\epsilon$ (“again”). Moreover, hers and Aphrodite’s apparent familiarity with both each other and the speaker’s situation reinforces the repetition on a level outside the individual poem, as the implied narrative mirrors the speaker’s poetic habits. This persistent return to an event or emotion, in the past or future, is a defining habit of the meditating mind. While in fr. 1, Sappho reflects on prior loves and one that currently plagues her, in fr. 31 she seems to focus solely on the speaker’s present experience but, in doing so, creates the potential for repetition in the future, the gaze acting as the facilitator of later self-reflection.³¹ Though fr. 31 does not record the meditation itself, it depicts the first and crucial step: forming a memory through vision. In memorializing the desired object and her effect on the speaker, Sappho creates a site for an eventual, possibly unwritten self-reflection.³²

Sappho uses the present in fr. 31 to convert a visual scene into a written one, the gaze operating as a tool of remembrance and a precursor to meditation. Her use of the present tense is also notable for when she shifts into and out of it within a poem. While fr. 31 is fixed in the vivid

³⁰ DeJean 1988, 40.

³¹ Relevant to observations of repetition and recreation in fr. 31 is the popular discussion of “that man” whom Sappho mentions. An exhaustive survey of scholarship on this matter would be impossible and unnecessary for my project, not to mention too invested in historical revelation. However, the commentaries of Budelmann 2018 and Hutchinson 2001 provide good examples of how consideration of this point may provide more interesting and productive insights into the dynamics of specificity and generality in Sappho’s poetry overall. Race 1983 also provides a brief and measured assessment of interpretive options.

³² Purves 2021, 186 argues for a different reading of fr. 31 via a different methodology. Investigating how apostrophe functions in Sappho’s poetry as an “animating” element, she suggests that, in this poem, a lack of apostrophe minimizes the desired “you,” causing her to “become increasingly invisible.” While we work from different points of entry to the poem, Purves’ argument seems to work counter to my adaptation of DeJean’s theory of vision as a method of remembrance and signification, at least in fr. 31.

present, fr. 1, 16, and 94 participate in shifts in temporal register that Alex Purves identifies as shifts between narrative and lyric elements. She describes this “lyric present” as a contrast to the past tense utilized in narrative exposition and as “connected to lyric’s central preoccupation with the articulation of the self.”³³ Sappho demonstrates this prioritization of present experience over past narrative when she switches temporal register within a poem, moments Purves describes as “self-reflection—what we might call the insistent surfacing or presencing of Sappho herself within the poem.”³⁴ The focus on intimate experience, regardless of whether it is autobiographical or generic, emerges when Sappho interrupts her narrative flow and grounds herself mid-thought. Moreover, two of the three examples that Purves cites involve Sappho explicitly returning to a prior moment, the very thing we saw facilitating meditation when examining the intersection of the gaze and the present sense in fr. 31. Sappho’s use of the present sense, therefore, doubly invokes self-reflection in these moments; it captures the vividness inherent in memory and propels the reader into the speaker’s immediate mental state.

In fr. 16, Sappho progresses from gendered generalizations about love and beauty to the mythic example of Helen, the latter of which is told in aorist forms (6–12). We learn that this tale has brought to mind the speaker’s own prior beloved, Anactoria (fr. 16.15–16):] με νῦν Ἀνακτορί[ας ὀ]γέμναι- / σ’ οὐ] παρεοίσας (“[this] reminded me now of Anactoria, [who] is gone”). This abrupt shift from epic narrative to intimate memory is a good example of what Page duBois describes as Sappho’s “capacity to disturb even the most traditional versions of narrative.”³⁵ The fusing of past and present in these lines also marks the phenomenon that Purves

³³ Purves 2021, 175. Whitmarsh 2018 also speaks to a presence inherent in lyric poetry; however, he describes a “lyric paradox” that hinges on the tensions “between a more-or-less fictitious performative immediacy, a speaking-to-you-now, and an awareness of [...] imminent canonization” (145). While Purves works within temporality *within* the poem, Whitmarsh considers the *external* experience of reading it.

³⁴ Purves 2021, 179.

³⁵ duBois 1995, 99.

observes: telling of Helen’s passion *has* reminded the speaker *in this moment* of a filed-away *memory* of a person who is *now* absent. The tenses mingle, the boundary between past and present blurring. Purves argues that the textual remembering triggers this temporal shift, as the speaker proceeds to recount visual details of the memory in the present tense, which she notably prefers to those things that others find most beautiful (fr. 16.17–20):

τᾶ]ς <κ>ε βολλοίμαν ἔρατόν τε βᾶμα κάμάρυγμα λάμπρον ἴδην προσώπω ἢ τὰ Λύδων ἄρματα κᾶν ὄπλοισι πεσδομ]άχεντας.	I would rather wish to see her lovely step, her face sparkling with light, than the chariots of Lydians or foot-soldiers with arms.
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The verbal presence vividly recalls the original scene, which the Sapphic gaze was able to record, while also recalling the martial elements of Helen’s context. We see the poet using the lyric present in contrast with the mythic past to both create a memory and revisit it, her temporal shift marking her textual self-reflection.³⁶

Purves demonstrates a different kind of shift occurring in fr. 94, one less founded in temporality and more concerned with the narrated vs. experienced scene. Almost the entire poem occurs in a past tense, both the conversation between the speaker and her now-absent lover and their shared memory of tender intimacy. Therefore, the difference between these two halves lies in their perspective. Narrative elements guide the recounted conversation, which switches back and forth between first, second, and third person (1–8):

τεθνάκην δ’ ἀδόλως θέλω· ἄ με ψισδομένα κατελίμπανεν πόλλα καὶ τόδ’ ἔειπέ[μοι· ὦμι’ ὡς δεῖνα πεπ[όνθ]αμεν, Ψάφ’, ἦ μάν σ’ ἀέκοισ’ ἀπυλιμπάνω. τὰν δ’ ἔγω τάδ’ ἀμειβόμεν· χαίροισ’ ἔρχεο κάμεθεν μέμναισ’, οἴσθα γὰρ ὡς <σ>ε πεδήπομεν·	I want to be dead, honestly. Weeping, she left me many tears and said this: “O! How terribly we have suffered, Sappho, truly, unwillingly I leave you.” And I answered her this: “Rejoice! Go and remember me, For you know how we cherished you.”
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³⁶ duBois 1995 observes a similar dynamic of memory-making in Sappho’s poetry (103), dependent in part of her shifting temporality (104).

Despite the varied perspectives and recounted dialogue of the poem’s opening, Sappho then has the speaker invoke her personal memory (fr. 94.9–11): αἰ δὲ μή, ἀλλὰ σ’ ἔγω θέλω / ὄμναισαι [...(.)].[(.)].εαι / ὅσ[– 10 –] καὶ κάλ’ ἐπάσχομεν. (“But, if not, I want to remind you of [...] and the beautiful things we experienced.”) Following this, the poem stays rooted in what Purves argues is a more lyric second-person address that denotes experience over narrative. I find that we again see a textual translation of vision, with the speaker’s gaze upon her beloved emerging through her intimate perspective. As she describes the vivid, sensual scenes, she recreates the memory in her mind through writing; she can see, smell, and physically feel the memory anew (fr. 94.12–23):³⁷

πό[λλοις γὰρ στεφάν]οις ἴων	Many wreaths of violets
καὶ βρ[όδων ...]κίων τ’ ὄμοι	and roses and [...] together
κα..[– 7 –] πὰρ ἔμοι π<ε>ρεθήκα<ο>	[...] you put on, beside me.
καὶ πόλλαις ὑπαθύμιδας	And many garlands,
πλέκταις ἀμφ’ ἀπάλαι δέραι	woven, around your soft neck,
ἀνθέων ἐ[– 6 –] πεποιημέναις.	made of flowers.
καὶ π....[] μύρωι	And [...] with sweet oil,
βρενθείωι. []ρυ[.]ν	costly, [...]
ἐξαλ<ε>ίψασα κα[ὶ βασι]ληίωι	you anointed yourself, royal oil.
καὶ στρώμ[αν ἐ]πὶ μολθάκαν	And on the soft bed,
ἀπάλαν παρ[]ονων	tender [...]
ἐξίης πόθο[ν]νίδων	you satisfied [you/my?] longing [...]

Purves identifies the reliance on nouns and adjectives in the creation of this scene as a “reflection on *things* [my emphasis] [...] where desire is renewed and released in what appears to be a gentle [...] cycle.”³⁸ I also find that the repeated invocation of the senses heightens the memory’s presence, contrasting the notable absence of the beloved. The tactility and tangibility evoked through the objects and senses allow the speaker to revisit her memory and reflect on a prior time. While the reported conversation in the first half of the poem is also contained in memory,

³⁷ Ladianou 2016 also identifies a desire to create and preserve a past memory (345–346).

³⁸ Purves 2021, 179.

the vividness of the remembered physical intimacy emerges as the more poignant moment of literary self-reflection. The speaker returns again and again, with each new object or physical marker, to the experienced moment to renew her remembered desire. This prioritization of conveyed experience manifests as a textual recreation of the original scene for the speaker's current ruminations.

The repeated renewal and release that Purves identifies in fr. 94 aligns with the repetition found explicitly in fr. 1 and 58 (through the adverbs δηῶτε and θαμέως, respectively) and invoked through DeJean's theory of the gaze in fr. 31. Repetition, presence, and the gaze interact throughout these poems to invoke the precursor to self-reflection: memory. However, one of Purves' examples, fr. 1, does not engage with memory in the direct manner that fr. 16 and 94 do. Nevertheless, since I have demonstrated the necessity of memory to self-reflection, we see an indirect invocation of remembrance in the use of μεριμνάω ("to meditate upon") and the other markers of repetitive rumination within the poem. Additionally, Purves has observed that lines 15–17 activate the same lyric present identified in her other examples. If we revisit those lines, we see a temporal shift within the tricolon of Aphrodite's questions (fr. 1): ὅτι δηῶτε πέπονθα κῶττι / δηῶτε κάλημι / κῶττι μοι μάλιστα θέλω γένεσθαι ("what again I have suffered, for what again I cry out, what I most want to happen to me"). The first verb, which is perfect tense, is followed by two present tense verbs. These lines follow a three-stanza introduction to Aphrodite and narration of her journey to meet Sappho. After this temporal shift, Sappho maintains the lyric present in her use of present and future tense verbs before concluding the poem in her identification of the verses as meditations (26). While Sappho does not directly invoke memory in fr. 1, her use of repetition, temporal and narrative shift, and reference to rumination include it as an unstated component of literary self-reflection.



In this section, I have identified markers of literary self-reflection and explored how they operate within Sappho's corpus. I hope to have demonstrated that we can maintain our distance from the historical Sappho while fully interrogating the personal voice of her poetic speakers. I also want to emphasize that we have not done so at the expense of her work's relatability; if anything, the recognition of how Sappho's poetic repetition mirrors the nature of self-reflective thinking makes us more aware of how our own minds may operate. These reactions and potential recognitions are why it is worthwhile to consider personal voice as a deliberate and functional literary tool chosen by an author. When we focus on a poem's speaker independently from anything we think we know about Sappho's life, we learn more about the artistry and poetics of Sappho as an artist.

II

“THAT MAN”: EXPLORING IDENTITY WHILE WRITING SAPPHO

Are you a Blue Healer?
Well I've been proud and lookin' in a mirror that's clouded
with smoke that's been keeping me shrouded,
believing I'm fine.
—Birdtalker, “Blue Healer”

In the previous chapter, I considered the personal, self-reflective voice prominent throughout Sappho's poetry as a literary element freed from the constraints of autobiographical expectations. The poet Sappho creates both precursors to and actualized moments of self-reflection for her poetic speakers through textual devices of vision and memory. We can never know to what degree the historical Sappho may have seen herself reflected in these poetic ruminations; however, I have demonstrated that this does not detract from the vividness of her literary personal voice nor our own ability to see ourselves reflected there. Of course, this voice is often considered the definitive and most celebrated feature of Sappho's art, both in antiquity and modernity. It is worthwhile then to consider how a specific aspect of her intimate poetic style, literary self-reflection, is received by later authors. I will consider the Roman poets Catullus and Ovid as two participants in the literary legacy of Sapphic self-reflection, not merely as recipients of her chosen themes, but, more importantly, as inspired by her poetics and aesthetics.

The same issues of generic vs. autobiographical personal voice persist in the study of these later male poets, though one may not know it from a survey of scholarship. I find that the nagging preoccupation and problematization of biography that plague Sappho's modern reception are not nearly as prevalent in that of Catullus and Ovid.³⁹ There is nothing inherently

³⁹ Hallett 1979; Lardinois 2021; Mueller 2021.

different in the way that poet and persona must operate in their poetry and therefore no reason we should navigate Sappho's literary artistry any differently from how we seem to comfortably do so with Catullus and Ovid. While individual arguments can be made for different degrees of interaction between these two entities among the three poets, they must all be approached with the same skepticism of autobiographical record and acceptance of poetic capacity.

A similar awareness in treating Sappho equitably emerges while considering the different types of inspiration others may have found in her work. Regarding reception in Catullus, Thea Thorsen writes that "Sappho is traditionally seen as the great model for concepts of love and gender, while Callimachus is seen as a model for poetics and aesthetic ideals."⁴⁰ In other words, scholarship has historically suggested that Catullus looked to Sappho for the subject and theme of his poems but did not imitate or adapt her methods. While it is certainly possible that this is the case, the abundance of ways in which scholars have overlooked Sappho's literary style in favor of her content gives one pause. Moreover, recent research on the Sapphic echoes in Callimachus' poetry suggest an even more foundational role for her work, including, as Thorsen specifies, "in terms of refined poetics."⁴¹ While I do not engage Callimachus within the scope of Sappho's influence nor as a model for Catullus, my study considers the reception of Sappho *beyond* the thematic level to which she has often been restricted. I hope to demonstrate that regardless of the myriad other literary styles influencing the work of Catullus and Ovid, the Sapphic poetics of self-reflection play a crucial role.

Of the myriad options of later poets writing with a literary personal voice, I have chosen to investigate Catullus and Ovid for evidence of Sapphic self-reflective inspiration for several

⁴⁰ Thorsen 2019, 88.

⁴¹ Thorsen 2019, 89–90. See Rissman 1983, 48–54 and Acosta-Huges 2010, 63–82 for Sappho's influence on Callimachus and other Alexandrian poetry.

reasons. It was Ovid's *Heroides*, a set of intimate texts made all the more complicated by their embedded mythical personae, and the nature of letter-writing in general that first sparked my exploration of literary self-reflection. I identified an inherently reflective context for these literary epistles, manifested in part by an internal awareness of the unlikelihood of receiving a reply. This includes a letter written from the perspective of Sappho to her distant Phaon.⁴² While *Heroides* 15 partakes in the same one-sided dialogism as the other letters, which I will explore more fully in the next chapter, Ovid's portrayal of Sappho offers a unique opportunity to investigate Sapphic literary self-reflection as received by another poet. The author of *Heroides* 15 explicitly invokes their muse while also revealing further layers of inspiration beneath the surface.

What becomes even more apparent through consideration of the Sappho letter is how meta-poetic and thematic rumination may emerge as indirect inspiration from Sappho's own poetry. The "real" speaker of *Heroides* 15, perhaps some combination of the male Ovid and the female Sappho, explores the interactions between their erotic and poetic identities through the invocation of another committed reader of Sappho, Catullus. Working from Hallett's model of the "Catullan voices" that emerge in Ovid's Sappho, I will suggest a sequence of inspiration operating between the three poets, from Sappho, to Catullus, to Ovid. Hallett demonstrates the intertextuality between the Roman poets as specifically interested in male identity, which I argue emerges as Sapphic-inspired self-reflection. Before exploring these larger intertextualities, I will demonstrate how Catullus also directly engages with Sappho's literary legacy of self-reflective poetics. While Ovid writes from a fictionalized perspective of the poet, Catullus translates

⁴² I will assume Ovidian authorship for my purposes. Even if not written by Ovid, my analysis of *Heroides* 15 as reception of Sapphic self-reflection holds; the internal self-reflection on the part of the speaker Sappho remains regardless of the text's author, as well as the meta-poetic reflection on loving and writing, as will be discussed below.

Sappho's writing itself. In addition to his inevitable engagement with the textual rumination of the poem he translates, fr. 31, Catullus writes further Sapphic self-reflection into his version of the poem. It is from the combination of these two different instances of literary self-reflection, Catullus' use of Sapphic poetics and Ovid's use of Sapphic themes and Catullan voices, that I see a sequence of inspiration and a persistent return to Sappho's meditative personal voice.

SAPPHIC POETICS IN CATULLUS 51

There has been much scholarly consideration of Catullus' *Carmen* 51 alongside Sappho's fr. 31, as can be expected. However, I have found no dedicated investigation of self-reflection in Catullus' poem and very few claims of harmony between the original Sapphic model and his added last stanza.⁴³ I argue that Catullus not only translates the poetic rumination of Sappho's verse but also incorporates further invocation of the vision and memory that define her poetic self-reflection. In his doing so, I see an authorial recognition of Sappho's use of self-reflection as a literary tool and Catullus' adaptation of it for his own poetic purposes.

In fr. 31, Sappho engages poetic self-reflection to fix the beloved, the object of the speaker's gaze, in her memory and create a vivid image to which she can return again and again. The speaker directly invokes her own vision when she says that "as soon as I see you, even for a moment" (ὡς γὰρ <ἔς> σ' ἴδω βρόχε' ὄς, 7), her physical symptoms arrive.⁴⁴ We saw how Sappho's persistent use of the present, with both literal temporality and gnomic aspect,

⁴³ D'Angour 2006 suggests that Catullus' fourth stanza may be a translation of the lost ending of Sappho's original, with *otium* replacing love, the subject of fr. 31, as the destroyer of kings and cities. Edwards 1989, 597 sees coordinating Homeric themes between Sappho's inner conflict and Catullus' violent scene. Greene 1999 explores how *Carmen* 51 reflects a difference of gender and, more specifically, how it reflects "conceptions of masculinity prevalent in Roman culture" (2). Hallett 2002 interprets the fourth stanza as a "woman's unheard voice," specifically the Lesbia whom the speaker Catullus addresses (424). O'Higgins 1990, in highlighting the higher stakes of forced silence in Sappho's oral context than in the textual literary world of Catullus, argues that the interruption of his fourth stanza mirrors Sappho's broken voice.

⁴⁴ For Sappho's Greek text, I follow Voigt 1971.

throughout the entirety of the poem works alongside the gaze to create a poetic site for repeated self-reflection. DeJean points out that Catullus mimics this repetition, “project[ing] the multiple gaze onto the [other] man” in the poem, rather than restricting the use of vision to himself, as Sappho does (*Carm.* 51.3–4): *identidem te / spectat et audit* (“again and again he watches and listens to you”).⁴⁵ Where fr. 31 says that the other man only “listens” (ὕπακούει) to the speaker’s beloved, the other man of *Carmen* 51 both watches and listens (*spectat et audit*). Presumably the other man in Sappho’s scene also watches the beloved, in addition to hearing her voice, but Sappho limits the memorializing power of the gaze and its resulting self-reflection to herself. Catullus’ scene doubles-down on this invocation of the ruminating gaze, which is further supported by his addition of *identidem* to the other man’s vision; this other man “again and again” watches the beloved, fixing her “again and again” into his memory for future self-reflection.

The identity of “that man” in Sappho’s poem has long been the subject of much discussion and has made the poem yet another site of speculation on the historical Sappho, specifically our understanding of her sexuality. As I have established, I am far more interested in how this figure functions as a literary tool and, more specifically, how it might affect our reading of Catullus’ adaptation. “That man” (*ille*) in Catullus’ poem has received considerably less attention, which I suggest is due to both heteronormative expectations and the disproportionate preoccupation with Sappho’s sex life.⁴⁶ Regardless, we can likely agree that in fr. 31, κῆνος [...] ὄνηρ must refer to someone other than the speaker, as we know that the Sappho in this fragment is, at least grammatically, a woman.⁴⁷ However, in *Carmen* 51, the speaker and this other

⁴⁵ For Catullus’ Latin text, I follow Fordyce 1971, who prints Mynors 1958. All translations are my own.

⁴⁶ For discussions of *ille* in *Carmen* 51, see Edwards 1989, 591–593; Greene 1999, 4–7; O’Higgins 1990, 157.

⁴⁷ Feminine participle in line 14 χλωροτέρα (“I am greener”).

individual share grammatical gender, which I argue opens up additional options in how to interpret the relationship.⁴⁸ While comparing Catullus' poem with Sappho's fr. 31, Ellen Greene suggests that "the primary relationship in [*Carmen* 51] is not between the speaker and his beloved but between the speaker and 'that man' (*ille*)." She sees this figure as representing that which troubles Catullus, the societal pressure of *negotium* ("work," "business").⁴⁹

I will return to Greene's argument later in my discussion, but from her observation I see the speaker projecting his own persona onto "that man" instead of including a third figure in the scene.⁵⁰ As Catullus plays with perspective elsewhere in this poem, between the first person of the second and third stanzas and the second person of the third stanza, it is not wholly infeasible that he could be using the third person perspective to refer to himself in the first stanza. As a result, the speaker effectively "watches" himself sitting across from his beloved and introduces yet another layer of self-reflective memorialization through Sapphic vision. The gaze functions on three parallel levels within the poem: the speaker creates an image, as if he has *seen* it, of his beloved and "that man," who also *watches* the same beloved; we then read that the speaker turns away from the third figure, himself or not, to directly *gaze* upon the beloved, the sight of whom generates a sequence of dramatic physical sensations. The thrice-invoked vision capitalizes on Sappho's poetic memorialization, as Catullus vividly records a scene to which he can return.

In addition to this rumination through Sapphic vision, Catullus adds his own version of self-reflection to the original poem. He replaces the last extant stanza of fr. 31, which describes

⁴⁸ There is actually no grammatical indication of the speaker's gender until the fourth stanza, after Catullus breaks from his imitation of Sappho's poem.

⁴⁹ Greene 1999, 5.

⁵⁰ O'Higgins 1990 observes that Catullus reverses the ordering Sappho's opening line, which begins with the speaker (φαίνεται μοι). *Carmen* 51 opens with *ille*, which, O'Higgins argues, "shifts the emphasis from perceiver to perceived" (157). We could also read this change as a mingling of the two entities, the perceived instead *becoming* the perceived.

additional physical symptoms befalling the speaker before Sappho proceeds to some other, unclear topic, with a self-directed scolding about his own leisurely tendencies (*Carm.* 51.13–16):

*Otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est:
otio exsultas nimiumque gestis:
otium et reges prius et beatas
perdidit urbes.*

Leisure, Catullus, is a trouble to you:
in leisure you revel and exult too much:
leisure has before killed both kings and
happy cities.

This closing stanza at first feels tangential to the longing, desperate vividness of the previous three but nevertheless engages with self-reflection through methods familiar from Sappho’s poetry. The repetition invoked in the earlier *identidem* manifests in the thrice repeated *otium* (“leisure”) in lines 13, 14, and 15, which Catullus chastises himself for pursuing too much.

While *identidem* functions like Sappho’s use of δηῦτε (“again”) in fr. 1 and θαμέως (“frequently”) in fr. 58B, which internally connote repetition through their definition, Catullus employs a literal repetition with *otium*. By placing it at the beginning of each of its respective lines, he auditorily or visually creates a site for self-reflection, depending on how his audience experiences the poem.

Catullus does not invoke vision in this stanza, whether through direct mention of visual processes or vivid description of a scene. However, it is the abrupt movement from visual description to mental exercise that engages with literary self-reflection, much like the authorial “surfacing or presencing” that Purves observes in Sappho’s temporal shifts.⁵¹ Each of the first three stanzas of *Carmen* 51 contains at least one term associated with vision, *uidetur* (“he is seen” or “he seems”) in line 1, *spectat* (“he watches”) in line 4, *aspexi* (“I catch sight of”) in line 7, and *gemina lumina* (“eyes”) in lines 11–12. The last of these describes an absence of vision, as Catullus, through Sappho’s model, writes that the sight of his beloved renders him blind: *gemina teguntur / lumina nocte* (“My eyes are covered by night”). In a poem so engaged with vision, its

⁵¹ Purves 2021, 179.

severance is notable: when Catullus' eyes are covered, the visual memorialization ends and the direct self-reflection begins. In *Carmen* 51, we see Sapphic vision perhaps replacing Sapphic temporality. While Catullus preserves the vivid present tenses of fr. 31, he does not follow the temporal shifting and blurring found in Sappho's other poems and remains firmly in the present for his reflective last stanza.⁵² In place of this marker of self-reflection, shifting temporality, Catullus again utilizes Sapphic vision, or the notable absence of it, to signal the shift. Catullus' doubling-down on the memorializing gaze in his own poetic meditations suggests an awareness of how Sappho uses it to craft literary self-reflection.

There is a final, rather notable marker of self-reflection in *Carmen* 51 that we have already observed in Sappho's poetry and will find again in Ovid's *Heroides*. Catullus marks the sudden meditation of the last stanza with a vocative and second-person address to himself, the presumed speaker of the entire poem. The stanza emerges as a "conversation with the self" reminiscent of the rhetorical question of Sappho fr. 58B, though considerably less ambiguous. This self-directed second-person address is not unique to *Carmen* 51, as the device appears much more extensively in *Carmen* 8, in which Catullus fortifies himself against the absence of a prior lover.⁵³ Where Sappho offers both the reader, and herself, an open-ended question, "what can I do?" (τί κεν ποίηην; fr. 58.7), Catullus prefers self-directed criticism. The latter presents a single moment of hesitation and self-questioning, while Sappho creates the potentiality for further meditation. *Carmen* 51, on the other hand, emerges as evidence of extended preoccupation, which by nature involves repetitive thought and rumination.⁵⁴ This more explicit and dramatic

⁵² Catullus must also replace the aorist ἴδω of fr. 31 with the perfect *aspexi* (7).

⁵³ Catullus also switches into third-person self-directed address about two-thirds of the way through the poem, which strengthens the possibility of him referring to himself in *Carmen* 51 with *ille*. Thévenaz 2019 sees echoes of Sappho's fr. 1 in the mixed perspectives of *Carmen* 8 (131).

⁵⁴ The last four lines of *Carmen* 8 contain a literal repetition similar to 51 (16–19): *Quis nunc te adibit? Cui uideberis bella? / Quem nunc amabis? Cuius esse diceris? / Quem basiabis? Cui labella mordebis? / At tu, Catulle, destinatus obdura.* ("Now who will visit you? To whom will you seem beautiful? Whom will you now love? Whose

expression of textual self-reflection again suggests an authorial awareness of what he takes from Sappho's poetry. Catullus not only translates the already self-reflective verses of fr. 31, but also incorporates further elements of meditative poetics not present in the original poem. This exaggeration of Sapphic self-reflection through invocation of vision, repetition, thematic shifting, and self-directed questioning reveals a poet who is hyper-aware of his inspiration and the power of literary personal voice.⁵⁵

Carmen 51 is an obvious place to look for Sapphic inspiration due to the very literal reception of the source text. However, we see yet another conversation with the self alongside reference to Sappho in *Carmen* 85, even though this poem is not as explicitly Sapphic as 51. Catullus' *odi et amo* ("I hate and I love"), which famously opens the two-line poem, is reminiscent of the similarly paradoxical γλυκύπικρον ("sweetbitter") that Sappho coins in fr. 130. While his positive and negative are in the reverse order of Sappho's characterization, the simplicity of both highlight the stark difference between the hating and the loving, the sweet and the bitter.⁵⁶ We cannot know for certain whether Catullus was consciously influenced by Sappho in this phrase, but the rest of the poem emerges as clearly self-reflective, especially when we consider it alongside the self-questioning of *Carmina* 51 and 8 (*Carm.* 85.1–2): *Odi et amo. Quare id faciam, fortasse requiris. / Nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior.* ("I hate and I love.

will you be said to be? Whom will you kiss? Whose lips will you bite? But you, Catullus, make up your mind, harden yourself.") The interrogatives that begin each question parallel each other auditorily and visually with their respective "qu-" and "cui-" sounds, and the presence of such a long series of questions themselves create an obsessive, ruminating tone. Greene 1995 identifies yet another element of repetition in *Carmen* 8 (80–81).

⁵⁵ D'Angour 2006 sees a separation from the model in Catullus' self-address and repetition, which "drive home the point that this represents Catullus' individual viewpoint rather than Sappho's" (299). While I agree that, with these choices, Catullus makes the poem his own, he does so through poetics that are essential to the self-reflective theme of Sappho's original.

⁵⁶ See Carson 1986 for a discussion of Sappho's γλυκύπικρον, what she may have meant by this term and how others have likewise described Love.

Why do I do this, perhaps you ask. I do not know, but I feel it happening and I am tortured.”)⁵⁷

The simple reading is that Catullus presents his question-and-answer between two discrete parties; however, given his habit of mixing and abruptly switching between perspectives, the “I” and the “you” of *Carmen* 85 are likely the same entity. We can therefore consider the indirect question of line 1 akin to Sappho’s similarly hopeless self-questioning in fr. 58B and the “answer” that follows in line 2 as a meditation like that of *Carmen* 51. Here the speaker laments the paradoxical, “sweetbitter” nature of love and questions why he partakes in it. The inevitability of loving and suffering corresponds both to the persistent struggle with *otium* in Catullus’ *Carmen* 51 and to the futility of aging in Sappho’s fr. 58B. All three instances present meditations on difficult aspects of life that are troubling their respective speakers. The Sapphic elements of Catullus’ poems link this literary self-reflection with her legacy, with Catullus’ translations of her verse or terminology serving as jumping-off points for further engagement with personal voice.

HEROIDES 15: MAYBE SHE GOT LOST IN TRANSLATION⁵⁸

As in Sappho’s fr. 1, the poet of *Carmina* 51 and 8 names himself as the speaker of the two poems, complicating the distinction between poet and poetic persona and luring those who seek the historical Catullus. Despite the impossibility of seeing a clear image of Catullus reflected in his work, the presence of an author’s name beside such instances of self-reflection still holds significance and power: even if Sappho and Catullus did not write autobiography by

⁵⁷ In *Carmen* 8, Catullus briefly slips out of second-person address to refer to the poetic Catullus as “he.” This shift occurs once he begins addressing his lover in second person.

⁵⁸ Reference to Taylor Swift’s 2012 “All Too Well.”

inscribing their own names within their poetic legacy, they still made the artistic choice to project themselves into the poetic narrative.

It is from this perspective of cautious open-mindedness that I will allow just a small amount of historicity to re-enter my discussion of literary self-reflection, especially as we shift into considering Ovid alongside Catullus and Sappho. Why does Catullus include his name in these turbulent, ruminating poems when he could have just as easily left it out or even devised a pseudonym for himself?⁵⁹ While we cannot know that these works *do* reflect upon those who wrote them, we also cannot know that they *do not*. For that reason I find it appropriate to let the poets' contexts, what little we do know about them historically, help us interpret the literary choices they made and what those literary choices reveal. Since we know considerably more about the social contexts of Catullus and Ovid, as well as the literary world that they shared, we can investigate how they both utilize Sapphic, literary self-reflection to explore those contexts.

We have already seen Catullus working with and beyond what he found in Sappho's introspective works, not only translating her memorializing poetics of self-reflection, but also adding his own elements of Sapphic repetition and vision. However, there are other Catullan poems that, after witnessing the awareness of literary self-reflection in *Carmina* 51, 8, and 85, appear to be partaking in the same tradition. It was through Hallett's identification of the "Catullan Voices in *Heroides* 15" that this became most clear to me, as she identifies places in which Ovid uses Catullus' poetic preoccupations with male identity to characterize his version of Sappho. I see a sequence of inspiration between the three poets. Catullus recognized the power of Sappho's literary, self-reflective personal voice and incorporated both her poetics and

⁵⁹ As he supposedly does with the poetic beloved, Lesbia, who many modern scholars believe stands in for his historical lover, Clodia Metelli. See Gram 2009 for a discussion of the various interpretations of Catullus' choice of pseudonym.

introspective theme into his work. In turn, Ovid utilized only the latter of these, the Sapphic theme of self-reflection without its poetics, transmitted through Catullus to craft his own reception of Sappho. What results is Gordon's "mannish" Sappho, a persona that feels at odds with what we have of her and more caught up with Roman, male anxieties than the ruminations of a Lesbian woman.⁶⁰ *Heroides* 15 both continues and corrupts Sappho's literary legacy, conveying meta-poetic self-reflection without its aesthetic artistry. We can utilize Ovid's selection from the Catullan corpus, however, to identify which moments of the latter's literary self-reflection may have been most relatable to his Roman reader. Though merely imaginative, we could envision an Ovid caught up in the relatability of Catullus' personal voice just as we are with that of Sappho.

Hallett surveys the places she finds Catullus and Ovid directly invoking Sappho in their work and draws attention to the peculiar way *Heroides* 15 fits into this reception. It is not necessarily surprising to observe that Ovid, an avid reader and receiver of his Roman predecessor, incorporates Catullan influences into this poem; Hallett suggests that Ovid wanted to offer a more complex and rewarding reading experience, given general appreciation for intertextuality among educated Roman readers.⁶¹ Why not, then, in his *epistula Sapphus*? However, when Hallett sees Ovid drawing inspiration from Catullus in his construction of Sappho, it is not in the latter's direct invocation of her (for example, in *Carmen* 51 or one of the Lesbia poems), but rather when Catullus explores himself.⁶² Nor is it from the places where

⁶⁰ Hallett's 2005 article responds to this Ovidian image of Sappho, coined by Gordon 1997. Gordon identifies a Roman inability to reconcile femininity with lesbianism, a "problem" to which Ovid responds by making a masculine Sappho reminiscent of the male recipients of the other *Heroides*.

⁶¹ Hallett 2005, 3–5.

⁶² Hallett 2005, 5. Hallett notes that Ovid does work with the paradoxical, and Sapphic, natures of Catullus' *Carmina* 51 and 85, but in a different text. *Amores* 3.14 seems to reference Catullus' *tenuis flamma* (thin flame) and directly invokes his *odi et amo* (38–39): *perque meos artus frigida gutta fluit. / tunc amo, tunc odi frustra, quod amare necesse est* ("Through my limbs a cold drop flows. Then I love, then I hate in vain, because it is necessary to love").

Catullus engages with the poetics of Sapphic self-reflection and invokes the memorializing, ruminating qualities of vision and memory (as we saw in *Carmina* 51 and 85). While Catullus works with Sappho's method, Ovid capitalizes on only the *theme* of literary self-reflection that he observes in Catullus' poetic introspection. Coincidentally, or perhaps as a result, both authors explore similar concerns that revolve around their roles as Roman men, lovers, and poets.

Carmen 65 is a complex piece of literary self-reflection, whose historical grounding helps us consider a context for Catullus' poetic choices. We can assume that the poem was written sometime after the death of his brother, an event that we learn is preventing Catullus from writing; indeed, most of 65 communicates this fact to the addressee, Hortalus, to whom Catullus promises a translation of Callimachus in place of his own original verse. Hallett identifies this poem as one of the sources of inspiration for *Heroides* 15, specifically in how Catullus questions his poetic identity and capacity. However, it is first worthwhile to investigate how Catullus incorporates Sapphic poetics of self-reflection alongside his meditative theme.

Compared to the highly wrought *Carmen* 51, with its implied and literal repetition, multiple invocations of vision, rhetorical self-questioning, and narrative shift, the self-reflection of *Carmen* 65 is considerably simpler. We immediately learn that the speaker is struggling to find his poetic inspiration due to the recent death of his brother (*Carm.* 65.1–8):

*Etsi me assiduo confectum cura dolore
seuocat a doctis, Ortale, uirginibus,
nec potis est dulcis Musarum expromere fetus
mens animi, tantis fluctuat ipsa malis—
namque mei nuper Lethaeo gurgite fratris
pallidum manans alluit unda pedem,
Troia Rhoeteo quem subter litore tellus
Ereptum notris obterit ex oculis.*

Even still, worry calls me, consumed by constant sadness,
Hortalus, away from the learned maidens,
nor can my mind bring forth the sweet fruit of the Muses,

it swells with such bad things—
For recently, in the Lethan whirlpool,
a flowing wave lapped against my brother's pale foot,
whom the Trojan ground crushes beneath the Rhoetean shore
ripped from our eyes.

“Worry” draws him away from his work, while his mind itself (*ipsa*) “swells with such bad things.” Catullus focuses on the mental aspect of the speaker’s grief, as it is this *cura* that actively distracts him, rather than the *assiduus dolor* that characterizes his worry. The privileging of mental over emotional grief is mirrored in *mens animi* as well, with the nominative term connoting reason and intellect and the oblique case connoting feelings. This mind dwells on his brother’s death, the choice of *fluctuo* creating the very relatable image of a grief coming in waves, surging and retreating. The iterative nature of this verb recalls the repetition that characterized Sappho’s self-reflection, with which Catullus engages in *Carmen* 51. The poem opens, therefore, with evidence of the speaker’s ruminations, both on and off the page.

At the end of this first section, Catullus plays with another dynamic of self-reflection that links this poem with the explicitly Sapphic *Carmen* 51. Just as he shifted from translated to original verse upon the covering of the speaker’s eyes (*Carm.* 51.11–12), in 65 Catullus likewise aligns the severance of sight with self-reflection; we first learn that it is the death of a brother, *ereptum nostris [...] oculis* (8), that is preventing him from writing. Following this visual separation, Catullus proceeds with a seemingly rhetorical question reminiscent of Sappho’s fr. 58B and *Carmen* 85 (*Carm.* 65.10–14):⁶³

*Numquam ego te, uita frater amabilior,
aspiciam posthac? At certe semper amabo,
semper maesta tua carmina morte canam,
qualia sub densis ramorum concinit umbris
Daulias, adsumpti fata gemens Ityli.*

Will I never see you, brother more cherished than life,

⁶³ Line 9 is omitted. See Fordyce 1961, 61n9.

again? But dammit, I will always love,
always sad songs about your death I will sing,
the sort that beneath the dense shadows of branches, sings
the Daulian bird, lamenting the fates of taken Itys.

This second invocation of vision functions a little differently than those in *Carmen* 51; the fourth stanza of the latter does not directly engage with sight at all, using other means to connect to the previous, memorializing passages and activate self-reflection. However, both capitalize on the *absence* of what was once seen to trigger introspection. Instead of the triple-repetition of 51, *Carmen* 65 relies on self-directed questioning and an explicit reinforcement of the lack of bodily vision (*numquam [...] aspiciam*, 10–11). The speaker will never again see his brother and can only interrogate him in his mind, which manifests as a one-sided dialogue in the poem. Catullus even evokes the dramatic paradox that characterizes *Carmen* 85, visually linking his ever-lasting love with mourning through the vertically aligned *semper amabo* (11) and *morte canam* (12). The second *semper* that opens line 12 incorporates repetition into the image, admittedly less than the *otium* of *Carmen* 51, and we can imagine a man fluctuating between thoughts of love and sadness as he struggles to compose. The singing he promises suggests an additional element of repetition, as his *carmina*, once he can write them again, will continue to memorialize the lost brother, again and again recreating Catullus' fraternal love.

It is within this image of mournful song that we can make our first connection to the self-reflection of *Heroides* 15. In lines 13–14, Catullus likens his outpourings of grief to those of the Daulian bird, the nightingale otherwise known as Procne before she was transformed. Hallett notes that he directly compares himself to the mythical mother, who grieves for the son she murdered as revenge.⁶⁴ The link between this reference in *Carmen* 65 and Ovid is well-

⁶⁴ Hallett 2005, 6. Rosati 1996 points out that Sappho also wrote a poem with a nightingale (fr. 136); however, the fragmentary nature of her poem prevents us from gleaning a reference to Procne or any other specific context: ἦρος ἄγγελος ἰμερόφωνος ἀήδων (“messenger of spring, nightingale with a lovely song”).

documented; not only does the latter include a detailed version of the entire myth in the *Metamorphoses*, but *Heroides* 15 invokes it as well. With a bit more detail than Catullus, the Ovidian Sappho also compares her grief to that of Procne (*Her.* 15.151–155):

*quin etiam rami positis lugere uidentur
frondibus, et nullae dulce queruntur aues.
sola uirum non ultra pie maestissima mater
concinit Ismarium Daulias ales Ityn.
ales Ityn, Sappho desertos cantat amores.*

How even the branches seem to mourn, with their leaves
set aside, and no birds sweetly complain.
Only the saddest mother, having impiously taken revenge on her husband,
the Daulian bird sings of Ismarian Itys.
The bird sings of Itys, Sappho of abandoned loves.⁶⁵

Hallett convincingly defends the connection between the two passages, pointing out similarities in word choice and the particularly notable use of the rare substantive adjective (*Daulias*).⁶⁶ However, she also suggests a key distinction between how the two authors compare their respective speakers with Procne. That of Catullus directly aligns his songs with those of the nightingale, as he likewise mourns for a beloved family member through song, albeit without the sinister responsibility. Ovid, on the other hand, uses the Daulian reference as an analogy for Sappho's grief, which Hallett argues is not restricted to a lost loved one. The simple reading of *desertos amores* is "lost lovers," but Hallett observes that the second part of this phrase can also refer to the poems recording one's lovers, the lyric genre that Ovid's Sappho has abandoned in favor of this mournful elegy.⁶⁷ Even with Phaon included in *desertos amores*, Sappho distinctly separates herself from Procne in the parallel construction (*Ales Ityn, Sappho desertos cantat amores*, 155), while Catullus correlatively connects his songs (*carmina*) with hers (*qualia*).

⁶⁵ For the Latin text of Ovid's *Heroides* 1–15, I follow Knox 1995. All translations are my own.

⁶⁶ Hallett 2005, 6, 13n22.

⁶⁷ Hallett 2005, 6.

Despite these subtle differences in the dynamics of figurative language, both poets dwell on an inability to compose poetry.⁶⁸ Amidst this mourning, both for a brother and for literary failings, Catullus incorporates Sapphic poetics of self-reflection to create a poem that ruminates on grief. *Carmen* 65 is a reflection on both fraternal and poetic identities; while we cannot claim to have glimpsed Catullus' personal introspections, his historical context has helped us identify Sappho's legacy of literary self-reflection. Moreover, the intertextuality between *Carmen* 65 and *Heroides* 15 demonstrates an Ovid closely familiar with the anxieties of this specific poem. Like Catullus, Ovid invokes the mythical Procne to express creative frustration. Unlike Catullus, Ovid contextualizes the literary mourning as completely external to himself. Remember, even though we cannot *know* whether the historical Catullus is the speaker of *Carmen* 65, he *could* be. *Heroides* 15, on the other hand, is presented as a letter from Sappho; within the literary suspension of disbelief, Ovid is completely out of the picture and these introspections cannot be his own. We are left with an Ovidian Sappho, who has supposedly abandoned both her Lesbian *amores* and her lyric compositions.

Ovid's choice of which Catullan voice to recall in his learned composition is telling. Rather than draw on the poems in which Catullus invokes Sappho or likewise utilizes a female speaker, as would perhaps be instructive for trying to imitate Sappho's voice, Ovid chooses a work notably concerned with male identity. Through *Daulias*, he invokes Catullus' fraternal and literary mourning to craft his own version of self-consciousness. Hallett sees a *Heroides* 15 concerned with authorial presentation and poetic identity, namely the masculine identity of elegy-writing, rather than the presentation of an authentic Sapphic voice.⁶⁹ Another example of this phenomenon lies in the gender-concerned *Carmen* 63. Hallett identifies language of

⁶⁸ Rosati 1996 also observes this thematic similarity.

⁶⁹ Hallett 2005,

Catullus' Attis reflected through the speech of Ovid's Sappho. Both speakers meditate on gender identity and fluidity, specifically that of a young man; Attis ponders what they consider a recent gender identity transition (*Carm.* 63.62–63), while Sappho describes, in gendered terms, the liminal nature of Phaon's youth (*Her.* 15.93–94).⁷⁰ Both Attis and Phaon have either recently experienced or are in the process of undergoing a state of change, characterized by both speakers as a loss of desirability. Sappho describes Phaon's fleeting boyishness as *utilis aetas* ("a useful age," *Her.* 15.93), while Attis more explicitly spells out the societal and erotic implications of their self-castration (*Carm.* 63.65–66): *mihi ianuae frequentes, mihi limina tepida, / mihi floridis corollis redimita domus erat* ("Those crowding my door, making my threshold warm; my house was wreathed with floral garlands."). It is in this lament of Attis' "lost stages and signs of his homoerotically appealing youthful masculinity" that Hallett sees a concern with male erotic identity and fluidity.⁷¹ Moreover, it does not matter whether these are Catullus' personal ruminations on his own attractive youth or theoretical meditations on Roman society; the theme of self-reflection persists, perhaps borrowed from his Sapphic inspiration.

The Ovidian Sappho, on the other hand, draws not from her supposed Lesbian model but rather from Catullus' topic of male sexuality. Hallett suggests that, in doing so, Ovid has made Sappho even more "mannish," citing Gordon's observation that "Ovid's Sappho is so masculine that when she chooses a man, she chooses a boy."⁷² In Gordon's view, Ovid aligns Sappho's behavior with the ancient Greek model of male sexual behavior, just as Hallett sees Catullus doing so with Attis. Regardless of its internal dynamics of age and desirability, Sappho's

⁷⁰ Hallett 2005, 7–8.

⁷¹ Hallett 2005, 8. Also see Skinner 1997 for an exploration of male sexuality constructed through Catullus' Attis. She characterizes the masculine identity that Attis rejects as the same societal responsibility Greene 1999 links with *ille* in *Carmen* 51 (139), which would suggest two Catullan poems concerned with Rome's expectations for an elite man.

⁷² Hallett 2005, 8; Gordon 1997, 284.

relationship with Phaon is defined by anxieties about male erotic identity. As she laments her lost lover, she muses over her own gender and sexual expression, but from a notably masculine perspective. Ovid has entered the picture from his supposedly external role as co-opter of the Sapphic voice. Like Catullus with Attis, Ovid uses the speaker's self-reflection to interrogate male sexual identity, a meditation that does not *have* to be his own but *could* be.

This historical context allows us to see the possibility for authorial self-reflection, of either a personal or societal scope, in the work of Catullus and Ovid. The poetics of Sapphic self-reflection have emerged in Catullus' poetry, including, but not limited to, when he directly engages with Sappho's corpus. There is also self-reflective intertextuality between Catullus and Ovid as they both explore poetic and erotic identity, whether autobiographical or generic, in a markedly Roman way. We observed that Ovid receives Catullus' exploration of these identities in his *epistula Sapphus*, his Sappho finding "in Catullus, her most congenial Latin interpreter, what the Latin poet had perhaps derived from Sappho herself."⁷³ Does this mean that Ovid indirectly engages with Sapphic self-reflection? Perhaps. I am convinced that Catullus identified Sappho's introspective poetics, as he explicitly works with Sapphic vision and memory as a literary device of self-reflection. Ovid, on the other hand, does not exhibit an awareness of these aesthetics and I argue that he did not see Sappho as his true inspiration, but rather what he imagined to be the authority of her voice.⁷⁴ He reveals a privileging of Catullus' Roman male literary voice, filtered through the appropriated persona of the female lyricist.

⁷³ Rosati 1996.

⁷⁴ I see a continuation of this dynamic in the argument of Thorsen 2014, which considers echoes of "Sapphic," i.e., Ovidian Sapphic, self-reflection in the *Amores*. Ovid utilized his constructed Sapphic model for later inspiration rather than Sappho herself. Ingleheart 2019 likewise observes various images of Sappho within Ovid's corpus that reflect previous reception of her rather than direct engagement with her own poetry.

THE OTHER MIRROR

I want to return to Ellen Greene's argument concerning "that man" in *Carmen* 51 to suggest an additional reason that Catullus and Ovid utilize Sappho's voice for self-reflection, whether aesthetically or literally, consciously or subconsciously. Greene links the *ille* that opens Catullus' translation with the original stanza that he adds; this figure embodies what Catullus *should* be doing rather than the *otium* that he pursues. Greene broadens the *negotium* represented in *ille* to encompass the societal pressures and expectations for a Roman man. Catullus, shirking these duties and instead giving into his emotions, as is expressed in the translated three stanzas, risks becoming feminized.⁷⁵ Greene's observation that the real tension within the poem lies between Catullus and *ille*, this external pressure, suggests an additional element of self-reflection. I see Catullus not only "watching" himself in this other figure, signaled by the repeated invocation of Sapphic vision, but also observing and pondering the self-doubt and uncertainty that arise from societal pressures of masculinity. We have yet another instance of Catullus as author utilizing a Sapphic creation to explore an identity relevant to himself.

I have now described several iterations of the following relationship: both Catullus and Ovid utilize a specific woman's voice, separated from themselves in space, time, and gender, to explore personalized, intimate identities. Why a female poetic voice; why Sappho?⁷⁶ As two Roman men living six centuries removed from the Lesbian woman, one wonders whether they could have found fictional personas more intrinsically connected to the social contexts they explored, either generic or historical.⁷⁷ Catullus and Ovid must have observed something

⁷⁵ Greene 1999, 7.

⁷⁶ A question echoed in Hallett 2002, 423. Rimell 1999 approaches this question alongside the *Ars Amatoria* and observes mutual didacticism between the two authorial voices of Ovid and Sappho, in *Heroides* 15: "There is no Ovid without Sappho, this is what the reader must learn: Ovidian self-invention is staged alongside and through Sappho's original didacticism" (133).

⁷⁷ After all, Sappho was neither the only literary inspiration for these poets nor the only one historically working with personal voice. I suggest Callimachus and other authors from the Alexandrian school as possible options.

uniquely relatable in Sappho's specific voice, enough that they could transmit their own male, Roman reflections through it.

Marilyn Skinner offers two ways to approach their choice. The first of these is that "Sappho's great poetic achievement [...] was to articulate a female desire so compellingly as to make it at once emotionally accessible to men as well as women," so that her reader-poet feels no choice but to imitate and impersonate her voice. In other words, Sappho's voice really is *just that relatable*. The second option is considerably more complex and as potentially harmful as it is supported by evidence and argument: "as we learn from ancient critical pronouncements, anecdotal evidence, and visual representations of the poet as cultural icon, male listeners and readers cherished Sappho's works as a socially permissible escape from the strict constraints of masculinity [allowing] men momentarily to 'play the other,' in Zeitlin's phrase, and so to release themselves from the necessity of being at all times publicly competitive and self-controlled."⁷⁸ In much of the scholarship surveyed for this project, I have found sub-arguments suggesting that Catullus and Ovid use Sappho's female voice as a form of permission to write intimately and reflectively.⁷⁹ Their society excluded the expression of emotion from its definition of masculinity and relegated that expansive facet of the human experience to women, harming both genders in the process. While Roman men were discouraged from sensibility, Roman women were not applauded for their emotional intelligence. As the Catullus of *Carmen* 51 makes clear, the man's "proper domain," Greene's suggested *negotium*, is the productive force contrasted with the destructive *otium* that characterizes his (and Sappho's) three emotional stanzas. In taking on the

⁷⁸ Skinner 1993, 137; Zeitlin 1996. See also Hallett 1989, who adapts Zeitlin's thesis to the Roman elite demographic and explores further the ways in which Roman women were seen, and may have seen themselves, as both Same and Other.

⁷⁹ Edwards 1993; Greene 1995, 82, which also illustrates the rationalizing process Catullus goes through in *Carmen* 72 to reach a point of self-understanding; Greene 1997, 7, 13n25; Hallett 2005, 4; Skinner 1997, 145–146; Edwards 1989, 600, from which we also see this antiquated perspective unfortunately transmitted into modern scholarship (598).

persona of a woman, Roman or not, to benefit from something that subjugates her identity, such exploration becomes appropriation, regardless of authorial intention.⁸⁰



The strength of Hallett's argument of echoed voices is her demonstration that in their respective works, both Catullus and Ovid construct masculine women—Catullus with Lesbia and Ovid with Sappho, the latter of which was discussed here. I have taken her observation further to suggest that Ovid, from Catullus' model, forces himself into Sappho's poetic persona and finds an opportunity for literary self-reflection; however, where Catullus works alongside his inspiration, Ovid overtakes her. When Ovid's "Sappho" trades lyric for elegy, he is molding his muse to the social space he occupies. What strikes me is the magnitude of the opportunity Ovid had—and missed. *Heroides* 15 held the potential for a deeply layered and complex piece of reception, incorporating both Sapphic and Catullan echoes to signal the relevance of both: the elegist who introduced the intimate, relevant, introspective voice to the Roman literary scene and the lyricist who developed it. What more appropriate premise is there through which to convey this creative debt than a love letter from Sappho herself, a form that, in the next chapter, I will argue is inherently self-reflective? We do not see this homage to Sappho in *Heroides* 15; instead, Ovid gives us a strange Sappho, unrecognizable except for her name and homeland.

⁸⁰ Morsberger 1993 posits that "a man writing in a woman's voice may therefore represent not sexist appropriation of woman's language but a need to explore what Edward Young called 'the stranger within thee'" (5). While I agree with the latter statement, I do not see how such "exploration" could *not* be sexist in a patriarchal society such as ancient Rome. Wyke 1994 also argues against the idea that such experimentation, which she says defines Roman elegy, is equitable. Skinner 1997 eloquently describes this harm as I see it in the context of Catullus (147) and Rimell 1999 describes how, "by silencing Sappho in the context of Procne and Philomela's tragic victory for women's battle to communicate and assert themselves, Ovid highlights the inevitability both of reading male authorial aggression in/to this poem, and of the ultimate power of the written word as epitomised in a woman's letter" (125). Davis 2004 adds the lens of tokenization through which to consider Ovid's writing of the *Heroides* as a whole (176–177).

III

LETTERS TO THE SELF: EXPECTATION IN OVID'S *HEROIDES*

But in a box beneath my bed, is a letter that you never read
from three summers back.
It's hard not to find it all a little bittersweet
and looking back on all of that,
it's nice to believe.
—Taylor Swift, “Tim McGraw”

EPISTOLARY THERAPY

The *Heroides* are overflowing with writers and readers. They are doubly authored both by Ovid, the Roman poet who composed them, and by the mythological, pan-Mediterranean women from whose voices they are written (as well as the three men included in the set of double *Heroides*). Only recently have studies trended towards considering the experiences and gendered voices of the female heroines outside of the male Ovid's ventriloquizing, a much-needed shift in scholarship initiated by Efrossini Spentzou's 2003 monograph.⁸¹ The multitude of readers is even more expansive: Ovid's Roman audience and the internal male recipients of the missives are the most obvious, while recent scholarship has established the intratextual community of female letter-writers as a secondary internal audience.⁸²

It is also, if not equally, important to include ourselves in this list of readers. While we as modern recipients of an ancient text do not directly factor into its original context, I am interested in more than this historicity. I have learned to read Sappho and other ancient authors not *solely* with my heart, but to honor those gut responses and allow them to prompt theories and

⁸¹ Spentzou 2003 works with feminist criticism to examine how the heroines explore innocence, authorship, epistolarity, and narrative within their letters.

⁸² Kennedy 2002, 222. Fulkerson 2005 considers the heroines as readers of each other's letters within the *Heroides*. While the insights they gain do not enable them to change the eventual endings of their set-in-stone mythical narratives, Fulkerson argues that such readership and intratextual influence grants them some authority over their own stories.

methodologies I may not have otherwise discovered. After all, that is exactly how this entire project began. On the first day of a graduate seminar organized around epistolography, I wondered what happens when a letter does not receive a reply. This question was prompted within the context of ancient letter-writing, both functional and literary, with an eye on the *Heroides* as the textual focus of our course. Within their mythological and narrative contexts, the likelihood of these letters ever being read by their intended recipients is incredibly low, for a myriad of reasons. This reality was immediately relatable to me. I had recently written a letter to a crucial and difficult person in my life, someone to whom I had been sending letters for years, especially in moments when conversation was difficult. These letters had never been answered.

Obviously, a great deal separates me and my letters from the women of the *Heroides*. However, what we have shared is the frustration of knowing our words would not be read by those who we most want to listen. In my case, I knew that my letters, in the form of emails, had been delivered and, sometimes, actually read! These are luxuries not afforded to Ovid's heroines. However, there was still an awareness that my letters had not been *considered*, the epistolary format dismissed just as quickly as my spoken words. The principal purpose of letter-writing had been broken and the supposed conversation emerged more and more to be one-sided.

It was with such an awareness that I had begun my last letter, yet this apparent irony did not strike me until that moment in class: why had I written it? What was the point? Despite the efforts of my late computer's failing hard drive, I did end up sending that letter. While I never got a direct reply, I learned that my letter was poorly received, my efforts at communication taken as a lecture that did not deserve a response. This perceived one-sidedness became an interesting component to add to the collection of epistolary features that my class discussed and observed in our ancient readings, especially those which contained elements of didacticism. Had

I been trying to teach my addressee something? Or, I began to wonder, had this education functioned in a different way? The realization that was emerging on a personal level, that my letter was actually intended for myself, sparked a question about epistolarity in general, specifically whether it inherently holds components of introspection. I wondered if letters were conversations with the self in the guise of conversations with another.

While introducing her discussion of the intersections between epistolarity and dialogue, Isobel Seara posits that “throughout the centuries, letters have been written not only with the aim of establishing communication, but also as a way to shape identity, as a way of *capturing the self* [...]. Born out of the silence of writing, the letter becomes an excellent exercise in introspection. While one of the worst *epistolary sins*—besides silence or a late reply—is narcissism, personal self-examination (which bridges the dichotomy between opening up towards the other and concentrating on one’s self) legitimizes the paradox of communicating the discourse of absence and, simultaneously, the desire for presence and dialogue.”⁸³ “Conversation” with the self is not only inherently invoked by the epistolary form, but also intrinsically fundamental to it. The impossibility of real-time dialogue between two correspondents requires a different kind of dialogue, one that is marked by tell-tale indicators of this separation. The letter-writer themselves becomes the other correspondent as they anticipate the response of the addressee and inevitably reflect on both this relationship and themselves. I suggest that this dynamic, which is quietly present in all letter-writing, becomes overwhelming when one is confronted with the “epistolary sin” of silence.

⁸³ Seara 2012, 364. There are many fascinating studies of such “capturing the self” and self-fashioning in letter-writing, particularly in the *Heroides*. See Elsner 2007, 25–28, 33, 41 who argues that Ariadne’s visual self-representation through writing controls how her addressee, Theseus, would picture her upon reading *Heroides* 10. Hinshaw 2021, 58–69 observes a subtly subversive aspect in this dynamic that simultaneously exists within the ever-present voice appropriation and capitalization on female suffering of Ovid’s text.

Of course, there are a plethora of letter-like communications, both modern and ancient, that are clearly meant as and manifest as purely functional communication. However, I am interested in those that do not serve such obvious pragmatism as discussing the logistics of conquest or asking after the health of a loved one. Rather, intellectually exploratory letters, the philosophical or moral treatises, are most likely to bear similarities to my own letters and the *Heroides*.⁸⁴ The didactic epistles of Horace shed some light on how these two elements emergent in my own letter-writing, didacticism and epistolarity, intersect in the ancient literary mind. Morrison has demonstrated that the collection of *Epistles* 1 contains both the instructive and conversational markers of didactic letters and, furthermore, engages with the literary predecessors of these combined genres.⁸⁵ What I find to be most interesting about Horace's text and Morrison's argument is what the latter says about the *narrator* Horace's involvement in his own didacticism. Morrison observes a sporadic intellectual progress that contrasts the successive temporal narrative of letters, a progress that "backslides" to suggest that "'Horace' himself needs the lesson, or the advice."⁸⁶ Horace's readers see a hesitating, confessional, and decidedly misbehaving letter-writer, who instructs his supposed addressee while simultaneously correcting himself.

While Morrison uses these observations to interrogate Horace's choice of the letter for his philosophical purposes, I see them as evidence of the inherent self-involvement of the epistolary form itself. Horace's self-questioning serves his didactic purposes so well because it

⁸⁴ Gibson and Morrison 2007 engage in a "thought experiment" of genre, exploring whether Cicero's *De Officiis* could be considered a letter. While their conclusion is most notable for highlighting the possibility of epistolarity within a non-epistolary text, they also discuss the "well-established ancient literary tradition of treating philosophy in an epistolary format" (9). Cicero's text is a philosophical treatise with epistolary elements, as Gibson and Morrison demonstrate. The *Heroides*, I will argue, are letters with philosophical elements, specifically those that pose questions to themselves.

⁸⁵ Morrison 2007.

⁸⁶ Morrison 2007, 125–129.

seems at home amongst the other literary features of the *Epistles*, the letter emerging as a natural place for workshopping one's ethics: both Horace's literary addressee and his external readers eventually learn through "Horace's" internal education. Morrison illustrates the commonality between epistolary and didactic features, as well as the resulting concordance between the two forms within *Epistles* 1, by highlighting "the most important 'lesson' of the *Epistles*," Horace's "urgent need to *ask*, 'how should I act?', 'what should I do?'"⁸⁷ This particular type of questioning is a natural aspect of ethics, letter-writing, and self-reflection. A person may ask their teacher or their addressee what they should do in a challenging situation, but they also likely ask themselves. I see Horace's self-questioning as genuine self-exploration and introspection, as well as invitation and encouragement to the reader to do the same. Furthermore, Horace's epistolary form achieves this feat in a subtle manner, the resulting conversation-with-the-self at home within the letter.

The suitability of the literary letter for philosophy may seem far removed from the premise of the *Heroides*, but Horace's choice demonstrates a Roman awareness, contemporary to Ovid, of the introspective nature of the epistolary mode. The *Heroides* as letters have been explored through a myriad of avenues, including Ovid's choice and success in presenting them so, as well as their legacy as a precursor to the epistolary novel.⁸⁸ I have also wondered at the implications of a *woman's* letter, what it means for Ovid to have taken up a double illusion in his authorial voice and situation: the female persona and the occasion for written communication.

Why choose the letter to tell these stories? Why write through the voices of the women

⁸⁷ Morrison 2007, 129.

⁸⁸ Kennedy 1984 considers the double *Heroides* and Penelope's letter for their engagement (and success) with the genre. Lindheim 2003 also surveys the characteristics of epistolarity within the *Heroides* and argues that the women emphasize their own failure at communication (13–77). Spentzou 2003 explicates the gendered stereotypes present in the double *Heroides* and connects these with other ancient epistolary fictions (125–139). Brownlee 1990 investigates Ovid's influence on Spanish romance novels and Kauffman 1986 explores epistolary literature from Ovid to the eighteenth century, arguing that letter-writing emerges as a form of genre disruption.

themselves? As I will never resolve these queries with certainty, I am happy to explore the effects of his doing so.

My avenue of investigation aligns with that of my previous two chapters: literary personal voice and self-reflection. Specifically, I will consider where the poetics of self-reflection, Sapphic or not, emerge in the *Heroides* and how they interact with epistolary features. I argue that the introspective nature of the letters depends on their writers' expectations: the less likely she is to receive a reply, the more her letter becomes a conversation with herself. These "conversations" are ruminating, self-interrogating, and, I will argue, ultimately therapeutic for their writers. As they present the evidence of their pain to their absent (or potential) lovers, the heroines validate their own memories and experiences, both to their myriad readers and for themselves. While this therapy does not produce any tangible or even satisfactory resolution to the writers' physical and emotional situations, the letter becomes a site of self-reflective processing and catharsis for the authorial persona. The epistolary treatment is as elusive as modern-day conversational therapy, which is not about "getting better" but rather self-learning. We must not forget, however, that it is Ovid as author who harnesses their memories and reflects their trauma. While I will examine the literary self-reflection of the *Heroides* primarily within their narrative context, that is, the suspended disbelief of the text as actual letters of wronged women, the historical male author remains the puppet-master of this epistolary therapy.

* * *

It is worthwhile to consider the diary-form as an adjacent, but different, mode of literary personal voice. The primary distinction between the letter and the diary is the public vs. private nature of the intended audience; even if a letter is addressed to a single reader, it inevitably

becomes a shared text rather than a wholly private one.⁸⁹ However, if the potentiality of an external reader is removed from the letter-writing premise and process, what remains is the opportunity, temptation, and inevitability of writing privately. Even the cliché salutation of “dear diary” invokes the form of a letter, facilitating a tangible conversation with the self within mimicked correspondence with an internal recipient. The trademarks of epistolarity remain and disguise the self-reflection, perhaps from the writer as much as their potential reader(s).

Despite these potential diary-like qualities, I think that all the speakers of the *Heroides* would like, if given the option, to communicate with their chosen addressees; at the very least, this is the motivation that seems to spark their composition.⁹⁰ Ovid primes his readers for this assumption by his choice of the epistolary form.⁹¹ However, several scholars have established just how impossible it would have been, within the heroines’ narrative situations, for these letters to have reached their addressees or, at times, to have even been written in the first place.⁹² Nevertheless, the barriers of actualized communication within the heroines’ mythical narratives remain. While such challenges to realism did not seem to be of much concern to Ovid, that is, they did not prevent him from writing the *Heroides* as they are, we can factor these external contexts into our consideration of authorial expectation and purpose of the epistles on an individual scale. This strategy is particularly relevant for the letters on which I will focus, those

⁸⁹ The intersection of the letter and diary is tangentially referenced in several investigations of both literary forms, specifically the distinction between diary and journal (Yáñez-Bouza 2015), the scholastic value of studying letters (Maupin 2016, 67), and the reception of the epistolary genre in a late 19th-century epistolary novel (Klevay 2016).
⁹⁰ Penelope and Helen want their letters to be received but not answered, as the former demands a corporeal reunion (*Her.* 1.2) and the latter fears the interception of her correspondence (*Her.* 17.267–268).

⁹¹ I cannot find anything within the extant ancient corpus that partakes in the same confessional intimacy of letters without the communicative quality that they also bring. We have, of course, the “personal” poetry of Sappho and Catullus, the Alexandrian lyricists and the Roman elegists, but it would be fruitful to compare Ovid’s choice of the literary epistle with an ancient literary diary. Both these genres are published, manufactured texts pretending to be the very opposite. The closest I can get is Marcus Aurelius’ *Meditations*, but as far as we can tell, those intimate, self-exploratory works were never meant to be published as literature.

⁹² Fränkel 1945, 37–39; Kennedy 1984, 415–416. Martorana 2020 also considers this epistolary paradox in *Heroides* 15: “Sappho could be said to be writing her letter for herself and to herself, rather than for Phaon and/or the implied reader, while she simultaneously formulates ad hoc her self-murder” (151).

of Oenone and Helen. Both addressed to Paris, *Heroides* 5 and 17 differ most recognizably in their positioning within the larger text. Oenone's letter comes earlier within the single epistles, joining fourteen other women who receive no reply within the Ovidian canon. Meanwhile, Helen's letter is itself a response to Paris and forms the first of the three pairs of double *Heroides*. The writers' respective identities as initial and consequent correspondent form the foundational elements of authorial expectation within each letter. In addition to these contrasted, external positionalities are internal epistolary features that suggest whether the heroine expects to receive a reply from her recipient. The most straight-forward of these are acknowledgements of the epistolary form and, subsequently, its function within the specific narrative moment. These statements directly inform our understanding of how the women envision the purpose of their letters and the role that such writing will play in their lives.

Alongside this direct engagement with their letter-writing is another type of epistolary marker. Questions are pervasive throughout the *Heroides*, including those of Oenone and Helen, but vary in the directionality and scope of their interrogation. All letters are, regardless of their purported utility or situation, inherently one-sided, both in their perspective and potentiality. The presence and participation of the correspondent in the moment of writing can only be imagined, even if an epistolary conversation is established, expected, and explicitly referenced in said letter.⁹³ The presence and nature of questions suggest an awareness of this absence manifested in the letter itself and, as Morrison suggests, are characteristic of the epistolary genre in that they are markers of engagement with the recipient.⁹⁴ This perhaps is familiar from letters we have written; though we cannot interact in the present moment with our correspondent, we

⁹³ "Absence" is a fundamental element of the epistolary genre and has therefore merited much scholarship on the subject. See Gibson and Morrison 2007, 3; Lindheim 2003, 8–10; Milne 2010; Morrison 2007, 109; Seara 2012, particularly 365–367; Wilcox 2012.

⁹⁴ Morrison 2007, 111, 114.

acknowledge their contributions to the conversation and make our own offerings. Oftentimes this question-and-answer is a key element of carrying on conversation at all, especially one characterized by absence.

The heroines employ such tactics of facilitating imagined conversation and creating an impression of presence from a reality of absence.⁹⁵ However, their manner of doing so responds to the specific situation of their mythic narrative and, most notably for my purposes, reveals the ultimate limitations of their conversation. Simple, answerable questions suggest the expectation of receiving a reply to both these queries and the letter overall. Broad, rhetorical, or even self-directed questions indicate a lack of this expectation; nevertheless, the questions and the letter itself persist. I reconcile these opposing forces, the presence of questioning despite the doubting of their being answered, by seeing them as evidence of literary self-reflection. Whether conscious of it or not, the women of the *Heroides* respond to their own expectations by demonstrating varying levels of self-interrogation and introspection, rumination and self-doubt. We must remember that such questions are familiar from our investigation of Sapphic self-reflection in her own corpus, as well as its reception by Catullus. The futility of Sappho's "what can I do?" (τί κεν ποείην; fr. 58B.7) feels at home among both Horace's self-didacticism and Ovid's abandoned heroines.

Before diving into the multitudes of complex expectation (and lack thereof) within *Heroides* 5 and 17, I will examine both types of questions described above in the letters of Hypsipyle and Hero. In addition to setting an interrogatory baseline, the inclusion of other letters will also begin to expand my argument regarding those of Oenone and Helen to the rest of the *Heroides*. Since I cannot give the rest of the heroines the time they deserve, I hope that this brief

⁹⁵ On the dynamics of absence in the *Heroides*, see Kennedy 2002; Lindheim 2003, 13–77.

consideration reveals just how much self-reflection there may be hiding beneath the epistolary veneer.

Of the many questions populating Hypsipyle's letter, *Heroides* 6, several fall into my second category and ruminate on her disrupted marriage. At lines 75 and 77–78 she asks whether she should “complete the vows” (*uota ego persoluam*), “bring gifts to the temples” (*dona feram templis*), and perform a sacrifice “in place of [her] injuries” (*hostia pro damnis concidat icta meis*), respectively.⁹⁶ There is no clear recipient for these questions within the scene; although she invokes Jason, it is not in a vocative or second person sense and so it seems unlikely that the questions are addressed to him. That leaves Hypsipyle herself as both the interrogator and interrogee, resulting in a moment of self-directed questioning. The deliberative subjunctives within each question reinforce this reading, lending a doubtful or meditative quality to Hypsipyle's statements. Despite the epistolary form and the acknowledgement of its external recipient, *Heroides* 6 involves conversation between Hypsipyle and herself.

In contrast, Hero's letter has several examples of simpler, answerable questions. Like Helen's epistle, *Heroides* 19 is a reply within a pair of letters and can therefore respond to specific features of the initial correspondence; the heroine can more directly engage with her recipient. Hero asks questions of her own, though these are simpler in scope than Hypsipyle's deliberations and, moreover, clearly directed at Leander (*Her.* 19.70): *cur totiens a me, lente morator, abes?* (“Why are you so often absent from me, slow delayer?”).⁹⁷ The second-person verb and vocative address cast the question outward to Hero's reader, which directly contrasts the first-person reflections that Hypsipyle offers. She goes on to ask Leander why he did not take the opportunity of some recent fair weather to come to her (74). Even if her lover is lacking an

⁹⁶ For the Latin text of Ovid's *Heroides* 1–15, I follow Knox 1995.

⁹⁷ For the Latin text of Ovid's *Heroides* 16–21, I follow Kenney 1996.

excuse for failing to swim across the Hellespont, he *could* supply her with an explanation in the form of a replying letter. Hero's interrogation suggests the potentiality for response in the simple, answerable nature of its questions. These challenges posed to Leander ask for explanation and justification of his absence, as if she really expects to hear what he comes up with. We could even go so far as to say that Hero, with her expectation of both a reply and an imminent visit from Leander, resorts to the epistolary form out of impatience rather than a necessary substitution for presence. Compared with Hypsipyle's internalized questions, Hero writes to Leander alone.

There is one more avenue of investigation that I will preview before moving on to my primary analysis of *Heroides* 5 and 17. My considerations of poetic self-reflection in the verses of both Sappho and Catullus in Chapters 1 and 2, respectively, often depended on vision and its ability to memorialize a moment for future rumination and introspection. Sappho's insistent presencing of the authorial persona in these moments of memory-making reinforce her desire to revisit this memory later. Repetition is key to Sapphic poetics and it emerges again in Catullus, who likewise capitalizes on the gaze's ability to prompt self-reflection. The invocation of vision is also pervasive throughout the *Heroides* and functions in a variety of ways.⁹⁸ I will focus on the role of visual elements within poetic introspection and how this compares with Sappho's memorialization. The gaze emerges as another signifier of self-reflection but in a hostile, judgmental manner. I will also demonstrate how the violence of vision can be transformed and used as a defense mechanism against the attacker. We are left with images that feel very different from the wistful, yearning memorialization of Sappho and Catullus, images on which neither we, nor the heroines, want to linger.

⁹⁸ See Elsner 2007, 26–28 and Hinshaw 2021, 46–58 for the function of the gaze in Ariadne's epistle.

PARIS, YOU PROBABLY THINK THESE LETTERS ARE ABOUT YOU⁹⁹

For the myriad reasons discussed above, Ovid's *Heroides* emerge as a perfect opportunity to explore literary self-reflection. The letters of Oenone and Helen are particularly appropriate for interrogating the relationship between expectation and introspection due to their shared addressee and mythical context, as well as the fact that the women actually appear in each other's missives. Despite their shared narratives and characters, these letters are not often compared, nor are interpretive links often made between the single and double *Heroides*. Spentzou's 2003 monograph claimed this additional innovation as the first full-length study that considered letters from both sub-collections.¹⁰⁰ While *Heroides* 5 and 17 were written at different stages of Ovid's literary career and fulfill different communicative roles, we will see that they share key epistolary and self-reflective features that make them particularly suitable for comparison.

Each heroine begins by not only locating her letter in the course of its correspondence, or lack thereof, but also revealing her confidence within the conversation: whether she expects to receive a response from her recipient. Epistolary questions, both simple and rhetorical, reinforce this positionality, even as the purpose of Helen's letter seems to shift mid-writing. She begins with simple questions that challenge Paris and ask him to justify portions of his own, initiating letter. Helen redirects this questioning to herself after she directly suggests a shift in her letter's purpose. Meanwhile, Oenone's letter utilizes this latter, rhetorical type of question throughout its entirety as she attempts to make sense of Paris' abandonment. In the end, both heroines turn to rumination and introspection upon questioning the nominal purpose of their correspondence.

⁹⁹ Reference to Carly Simon's 1971 "You're So Vain."

¹⁰⁰ Drinkwater 2004.

The first indicator of expectation in Helen's letter is external to her epistle, in that it follows *Heroides* 16, Paris' letter to Helen. Its positioning as a response to an already received, initiating missive establishes a reciprocal correspondence and the potentiality of a continued exchange. As opposed to letters that we know *could not* have been either successfully sent or received due to logistics, such as the truly abandoned Ariadne on the deserted Naxos, *Heroides* 16 and 17 circulate within the house of Menelaus, a place where Helen herself holds some power. The perilous situations of the letter-writers both create the need for epistolary communication (or, as we will learn, through the similarly inconspicuous mode of Helen's servants) and leave the path open for further, not-yet-written letters to be sent.¹⁰¹

Helen begins her letter by establishing herself as not only a respondent but also a reluctant one. After reading Paris' letter, she decides it is worth it to send a reply (*Her.* 17.1–2): *nunc oculos tua cum uiolarit epistula nostros, / non rescribendi gloria uisa levis.* (“Now, since your letter has violated my eyes, the glory of not responding seems cheap.”) Helen places herself in the position of the recipients of the other heroine's letters; instead of a desperate lover, she is the aloof one who might not respond. She only writes back because it would be “cheap” not to do so, perhaps even unworthy of her. While the choice of adjective is an interpretive challenge for modern readers, Helen's estimation highlights how close Paris was to meeting the same fate as the fifteen prior, unanswered letter-writers. The end of Helen's epistle also directly indicates her expectation of continued correspondence. While she suggests that this may not, and even should not, take the form of a written letter, Helen instructs Paris to respond to her missive. Instead of a letter, they should communicate through her personal servants.¹⁰² Helen is confident that whatever she writes to Paris will produce a reply, one way or another.

¹⁰¹ Kennedy 1984, 414–416.

¹⁰² *Her.* 17.265–268.

We also see Helen's role as respondent emerge in her manipulation of Paris' exempla. While he believes he has offered Helen excellent adulterous models to follow, she refutes many of these and reveals their own cheapness.¹⁰³ It is at these moments that she posits seemingly rhetorical questions that emerge as legitimate challenges rather than her own ruminating thought-processes.¹⁰⁴ Another inquiry Helen poses to Paris precedes these counter-exempla in line 10: *quis sic intrabas, hospes an hostis eras?* ("You who entered in this way, were you guest or enemy?") Both this question and those that break down his overly confident exempla place Paris in the reflective role, as Helen forces him to re-think his justifications for wooing her and his very presence at Sparta. Rather than using these moments for the introspection and deliberation that Paris seems to anticipate, she demonstrates both her confidence in receiving a reply to her letter and a personal resolve that is not easily swayed. Helen does not leave space in her writing for literary self-reflection and instead forces any moments of self-interrogation back onto Paris.

While these counter-exempla pervade much of her letter, Helen indicates a shift in purpose just past the half-way point of the poem (143–144): *nunc quoque quod tacito mando mea uerba libello, / fungitur officio littera nostra nouo.* ("Even now that I entrust my words to a silent little book, my writing performs a new service.") The context within which these lines fall suggests that she is new to correspondence with men other than her husband; she is "unpracticed in the artifice of love" (*rudis ad Veneris furtum*, 141) and "ignorant of the world" (*nescia rerum*, 145). After this interjection of literary purpose, however, Helen's writing style shifts from confident challenges and self-assuredness to self-doubt and deliberation. Once resolute, she

¹⁰³ Walker 2021. Two such "exemplary" situations and individuals are Theseus's previous abduction of Helen (21–34) and Zeus' "seduction" of Leda (41–50).

¹⁰⁴ *Her.* 17.21–22: *an, quia uim nobis Neptunius attulit heros, / rapta semel uideor bis quoque digna rapi?* ("Since the Neptunian hero used force against me, do I, stolen once, seem fitting to be stolen also a second time?"); 42: *quid prohibet raris nomen inesse meum?* ("What prevents my name from being among the rare?"); 50: *felix in culpa quo Ioue dicar ego?* ("In which Jove will I be called happy in my fault?").

appears to waver over her identity as *rudis* and *nescia*, an uncertain state that hinges on her re-stated purpose and is best reflected in the similarly shifting nature of her questions. Helen's interrogations of Paris dramatically decrease in frequency, and we see a parallel increase in questions posed to herself. She asks whether she will follow Paris to Troy and be his wife, as well as how others will react, specifically the Spartans and Trojans.¹⁰⁵ This lack of conviction dramatically contrasts her earlier unflinching assertions and refutations of Paris' reasoning.

As Helen wavers, she turns inward, utilizing the letter she has already begun as a medium for contemplation. The *tacitus libellus*, translated by some as "voiceless page" or "secret letter," manifests another type of intimate writing.¹⁰⁶ The term *libellus* literally means "little book" but it could also be Helen's personal diary, a place where she might write privately and work through her thoughts before sharing them.¹⁰⁷ The term also recalls Catullus' *nouus libellus* ("new little book") in *Carmen* 1, as he introduces a novel type of literature. The merging of published, entertaining poetry and the personal, confessional voice by Catullus further bridges the gap between letter and diary and offers a contemporary model for Helen's epistle. Ovid likewise links the potentially public and the private, the *libellus* and the *littera*; the reader cannot know if they are the same or separate entities, as there is no mention of writing besides the letter within the sentence or the poem overall. The purposes of each genre merge and introduce a more complicated context for Helen's letter. While it will still be sent to and shared with Paris, as indicated by her final instructions to continue the correspondence, Helen introduces a markedly different, self-directed mode of writing.

¹⁰⁵ *Her.* 17.205–206, 209–212. Helen's preoccupation with her reputation is a common theme throughout the mythical narratives in which she features. See Blondell 2013.

¹⁰⁶ Showerman 1977, 235 and Kenney 1996, 137n143, whose suggestion of "secret" for *tacitus* works well for both a furtive letter and the private musings within an intimate diary.

¹⁰⁷ See Cicero *Phil.* 1.7.16 and 1.8.19 and Quintilian 10.7.31 for the use of *libellus* to refer to one's personal writings, notes, or unofficial drafts.

Oenone's letter does not undergo such a transition and instead suggests ruminating self-reflection from the beginning. Just as Helen immediately reveals the specific power dynamics of her correspondence, Oenone likewise begins with a clear indication of whether she expects to receive a reply from Paris. Her specific concerns actually supersede this, as she fears that he may not read the letter even if he does receive it (*Her.* 5.1–2): *Perlegis? an coniunx prohibet noua? perlege: non est / ista Mycenaea littera facta manu.* (“Are you reading this? Or does your new wife forbid it? Read it! It is not a letter written by a Mycenaean hand.”) The interrogative and imperative of *perlegere* within the same line emphasize Oenone's anxiety, while the interspersed explanations for why Paris may not be able to read her words soften the blow of his not doing so. Initially, Oenone seems to hope that if her letter is not read, it is due to external factors like Helen or his fear of a Spartan missive, rather than Paris' own disinterest.

The irony of the former obstacle emerges once Ovid's reader reaches the 17th installment of the *Heroides*, as Helen also struggles while writing to Paris. As discussed above, Helen's ultimate uncertainty concerns her own future actions and decidedly *not* whether Paris will read her letter. Oenone's epistle, located much earlier in the collection but temporally penned within the mythology after Helen's, is deprived of this luxury of certainty. As part of the single *Heroides*, it is positioned as an isolated missive that initiates but does not maintain correspondence, unlike the fulfilled communications of the double *Heroides*. Ironically, Oenone's letter seems to have the greatest logistical feasibility of being delivered out of all the single *Heroides*; after all, Mt. Ida is not too distant from Troy. Nevertheless, the letter's canonical identity as initiating missive, combined with Oenone's immediate doubts, indicates that she does not expect to receive a reply.

The contrasted expectations of the two letter-writers are heightened by the fact that it is Helen herself who might prevent Oenone's epistle from being answered. After reading *Heroides* 17, Ovid's reader can further appreciate Oenone's anxiety in its contrast with Helen's confidence. Moreover, Oenone writes that, even if Paris receives her letter and is able to read it, he may not be willing to do so (3–4): *Pegasis Oenone, Phrygiis celeberrima siluis, / laesa queror de te, si sinis ipse, meo.* (“It is the fountain-nymph Oenone, well-known to the Phrygian forests. Wronged, I have a complaint about you, [you who are] mine, if you yourself will allow it.”) Oenone immediately acknowledges her lack of power as a letter-writer and in realizing her desired communication. First citing Helen as a potential obstacle to having her missive read, Oenone now envisions Paris, the recipient himself, as the one controlling her epistolary fate. She goes beyond questioning whether she will receive a reply, instead doubting that her letter will have a chance to be read or considered in the first place.

The other questions populating Oenone's letter also suggest that she does not expect to receive a response from Paris. Rather than the confrontational challenges that Helen offers, Oenone's questions are primarily self-reflective, either wondering at her own suffering or reminiscing about time spent with Paris.¹⁰⁸ About halfway through her epistle, Oenone interrupts her account of discovering Paris arriving back at Ida with Helen to ask, “why was I mad enough to stay?” (*quid enim furiosa morabar?*, 69). While recounting her painful memory to the very one who wronged her, she mentally returns to the moment and questions her own actions; Oenone interrupts her letter to Paris to communicate with herself. She doubts her prior self's decision-making just as she doubts whether the letter will reach its recipient. This latter

¹⁰⁸ *Her.* 5.5–6: *quis deus opposuit nostris sua numina uotis? / ne tua permaneam, quod mihi crimen obest?* (“What god has set his will against my prayers?”); 17–18: *quis tibi monstrabat saltus uenatibus aptos / et tegeter catulos qua fera rupe suos?* (“Who would point out to you gullies perfect for the hunt, and in which rock the wild beast hides her cubs?”).

questioning creates space for the former, since Oenone does not need to limit herself to whatever words she wants Paris to hear. In acknowledging that he may not read her letter, she also recognizes that the only “reader” might indeed be herself. In the midst of remembered pain, Oenone creates a literary space for introspection.

While Oenone’s letter differs from Helen’s in its consistency of self-doubt and self-questioning, this narrative moment brings the two women closer. *Heroides* 5 has already forced a literary, intratextual confrontation of the two letter-writers in Oenone’s initial reference to Helen as a potential obstacle to being read. This memory now recalls a literal narrowing of the physical space between them, with Helen arriving at Oenone’s homeland as the latter watches from a distance. The self-questioning identified earlier is prompted by the experience of seeing Helen, with considerable attention given to the visual details of the unfolding scene. Within these lines, Oenone uses many words related to vision, such as *aspicit*, *cognoui*, *fulsit*, and *uidi*, to describe vivid images of the tall cliff from which she watched, the tell-tale sails of Paris’ ships, and the first glimpse of the royal purple he now wears (lines 61–68). These verbs call further attention to the act of seeing as the impetus for turning her rumination inwards; it is Oenone’s optical confrontation with Helen that sparks her self-reflection and self-questioning. Falling just before she asks herself why she was “mad enough to stay,” the focus on vision seems to suggest that Oenone’s real question was, “why did I continue looking to see Helen in Paris’ embrace?”

The introduction of vision as a further lens through which to view Oenone’s self-reflection is reminiscent of the memorializing gaze in Sappho’s poetry. Of course, the Lesbian verses are far removed from Ovid by time and distance, though we have already seen them received and adapted in the Catullan corpus. As a reader of Catullus and Sappho, it is not impossible that Ovid would have also looked to Sapphic poetics as inspiration for literary

introspection. However, the notable absence of such aesthetics in “Sappho’s” epistle itself has suggested otherwise. *Heroides* 5 and 17 likewise do not engage with the Sapphic poetics of memorialization and utilize vision differently.

In emphasizing the act of viewing, as Oenone does while recounting Paris’s return, she primes herself for a moment of self-reflection that is actualized when she remembers her first glimpse of Helen. Yet this is not the nostalgic memorialization of Sappho’s fr. 16 or 94 that lingers and renews pleasure, but a markedly painful and traumatic remembering. Oenone continues to describe how she lamented upon seeing Helen and creates a scene rich in visual and auditory detail (lines 71–74), after which she shares what she envisions for Helen’s future (75–76): *sic Helene doleat defectaque coniuge ploret, / quaeque prior nobis intulit, ipsa ferat.* (“So may she grieve and weep, when Helen is failed by her husband, and that which she first inflicted upon me, may she suffer that very same thing.”) Although Oenone does not use any explicit terms of seeing here, the vividness of her torn bosom, beaten chest, and scratched and streaming cheeks in the preceding description defines what she omits. Oenone only describes this imagined, cast-out Helen in terms of herself, the revenge she wants defined by her own experience and appearance.

Heroides 5 uses the image of Helen as a trigger for literary self-reflection in two ways. Firstly, the sight of her former lover’s new wife, now committed to memory, prompts Oenone to question herself in the moment of writing. The power of her gaze upon another, even remembered, is so strong that it forces Oenone out of the pretense of writing to Paris and into explicitly addressing herself. If there is memorialization here, it is more hostile and decidedly more painful than the bittersweet longings of Sappho; Oenone uses her remembered gaze to not only reflect upon, but also attack her former self. Secondly, Oenone casts a vision of this

memorialized self onto Helen. These projections primarily serve as a means of describing what Oenone believes is justice, but in doing so, she also creates another version of herself: a mirror image.

This reflected Oenone serves as another instrument of self-judgment. Shadi Bartsch has interrogated models of introspection and connects vision with self-knowledge in authors ranging from Plato to Seneca the younger. She identifies the literary invocation of the mirror as a symbol of effeminate luxury and deceptive illusion, but also as a mode of seeing the true form of the self. The viewer utilizes this mirror, literal or figurative, as a means of introspection and self-interrogation.¹⁰⁹ Bartsch sees greater agency in this mirror, which takes on the role of the “judging other,” a manufactured tool of self-accountability for the viewer.¹¹⁰ Further self-reflection emerges in *Heroides* 5 through this “mirror of the self.” When the writing Oenone projects an image of herself onto the epistolary Helen, she creates an opportunity for judgment. The very woman who embraced Paris on the ship now becomes the “judging other” in Oenone’s memory, but it is not really Helen who is the judge. This imagined, lamenting Helen is a mirror image of Oenone as she stood on the cliff and watched the scene unfold. The written, epistolary mirror becomes an opportunity for greater self-knowledge, the letter-writer progressing from questioning to judging the former self that stayed and watched. Oenone’s literary judgment upon Helen becomes judgment of herself.

Of course, this is not the only place in the *Heroides* where we see Helen. Despite her concern for how others perceive her, the Helen of *Heroides* 17 does not incorporate visual craft

¹⁰⁹ Bartsch 2006. Bartsch also warns against projecting modern conceptions of self-exploration and the search for one’s identity onto antiquity, but nevertheless observes a complex potentiality for self-understanding in the symbolic mirror (54–56).

¹¹⁰ Bartsch 2006, 18–28.

into her self-fashioning.¹¹¹ However, the gaze does feature prominently in this letter and in a manner also described by Bartsch. Vision as a tactile, physical force is common to all five schools of optical theory that Bartsch discusses, all of which locate the gaze in sexual connotations and contexts. The key element for the sexualized gaze is the potentiality for touching that it creates, a means of intimate connection across space and distance that does not require bodies to meet.¹¹² For Helen and Paris, their courtship, whether mutually desired or not, must operate within these bounds of physical separation due to the nature of their setting and situation. Nevertheless, Helen writes that she can barely withstand Paris' gaze as he watches her in the banquet room (77–78): *cum modo me spectas oculis, lasciuē, proteruis, / quos uix instantes lumina nostra ferunt* (“When now, you watch me, creep, with those shameless eyes, those that mine can hardly endure as they threaten me”). The terms that Helen uses to describe this attack suggest the physical manifestation of seeing. Paris' eyes literally “stand over” (*instantes*) Helen as they threaten her, a corporeal presence that she describes as being “hardly bearable” (*vix [...] ferunt*). While both verbal forms primarily fulfill figurative meanings, they also invoke a physicality that is appropriate for the bodily effect of his gaze. We also hear that Paris has coupled his “shameless eyes” (*proterui oculi*) with another means of indirectly touching Helen, by drinking water not merely from the same cup as her, but from the exact spot where she last drank (lines 79–80).¹¹³ Paris is nothing if not persistent in his attempts to gain access to Helen's body, his self-entitlement practically dripping from his own letter and further referenced in Helen's.

¹¹¹ See note 25 and Drinkwater 2013, who argues that the Helen of *Heroides* 17 fashions herself as an astute reader and student of Ovid's own *Ars Amatoria*.

¹¹² Bartsch 2006, 58–66.

¹¹³ *Proteruis* can also be defined as “violent,” which lends greater aggression to Paris' gaze.

The success that Paris initially seems to have in this banquet scene is rebuffed even after Helen has acknowledged the ability of his gaze to disturb her (97–101):

*disce modo exemplo formosis posse carere;
est uirtus placitis abstinuisse bonis.
quam multos credis iuuenes optare quod optas?
qui sapiant oculos an Paris unus habes?
non tu plus cernis sed plus temerarius audes*

Learn by my example how to be without beauty:
it is a virtue to abstain from good pleasures.
How many young men do you think want what you want?
Who are wise? Or do you alone, Paris, have eyes?
You do not “see” more but dare more rashly.

Her seemingly simple, direct question responds to an argument within Paris’ letter that beauty is a valid justification for his claim on her.¹¹⁴ Helen asserts that this is not the case, if only he would follow both her own and others’ example. We again see signifiers of the letter-writer’s awareness and expectation of a response. Helen poses a query to Paris that he could conceivably answer, even if it is primarily a means for humbling him; it is not a rhetorical question directed at herself. By invoking Paris’ eyes within this question, she also recalls the penetrating gaze and insufferable presumption to which he subjected her. Helen utilizes the memory-building power of vision to take a second look at Paris’ actions and prompt reflection; however, it is not her own introspection that these lines trigger. Helen invokes Paris’ vision to turn the necessity for introspection back upon him, as he must now question his own prior attempts, their efficacy, and their place at Helen’s table. She prompts him to think of other young men and realize that neither his desire nor his argument is unique; rather, his individualism is marked by daring and, we can deduce, a lack of self-knowledge. Occurring before the marked shift in her letter’s stated utility,

¹¹⁴ *Her.* 16.93–106.

Helen's invocation of vision and outward questioning reinforce both her initial confidence in herself and the purpose of her writing.



When we read through the fifteen verse letters, we come here and there upon a passage the like of which we ourselves meant to write in some crisis of our own life. I say that we meant to, and not that we did, because I am thinking of a special kind of letter, the kind which in actual fact we rarely put down on paper and would hardly ever drop in the mailbox. [...] For one or another of these reasons, our letter never materialized; and yet for our own sake we worked it out mentally.¹¹⁵

I find in Hermann Fränkel's comments on the *Heroides* a thrilling familiarity in thinking on two matters. The first is in the orientation of these letters toward their internal writers and their intimate, self-sustaining purposes. Fränkel calls them "thought letters," in which "we are permitted to read the mind of a lonely woman in distress and to watch its passionate arguing, anxious searching, pensive musing, and wishful daydreaming."¹¹⁶ The two of us see letter-writing as more than a means of external communication, whether the missives are sent out into the world or held close, whether transcribed in tangible ink or composed upon the silent page of the mind. The second is Fränkel's willingness to use his own Othered relationality (as a Jewish German-American classicist who emigrated in the early 1930s) and subsequent personal reactions to the ancient text as the inspiration for academic exploration and, moreover, to *include* those personal responses and instincts in his scholarship, not necessarily as evidence but as origination and explanation of theory.¹¹⁷ It would have benefitted me to have read his work before beginning this project, nervous as I was to bring my personal instincts into the

¹¹⁵ Fränkel 1945, 36–37.

¹¹⁶ Fränkel 1945, 37, 39.

¹¹⁷ Calder III describes the original material that would be later published as Fränkel's 1945 book: "His lectures were a sort of autobiography by a scholar between two worlds."

professional sphere. However, perhaps it is better, or at least more rewarding, that I reflected on these hesitations on my own rather than “conversing” with another in this regard.¹¹⁸

Our own ability to relate to these “thought letters” is all well and good, but can we assert that they “achieve” anything in their own right? Regardless of the heroines’ expectations or lack thereof, their letters receive no reply, at least not within the Ovidian canon. The ensuing events within their mythic narratives might offer some tempting closure to their lamentations—Helen goes to Troy with Paris, only to eventually return to Sparta, and Oenone returns his abandonment in the end when Paris most needs her loyalty—but both women’s written words are left unread and unfulfilled. Even after considering the self-reflection and introspection demonstrated in this chapter, what do their ruminations achieve? Looking back to our other female model of self-reflection, what does Sappho gain in her memorializing? I have already suggested that such poetic, feminine self-exploration emerges as an appropriated opportunity in the potentially very personal verses of Catullus and Ovid. The male poets may try on the identity of the Other for their own benefit, whether conscious or not of the literary debt they owe to Sapphic self-reflection. This dynamic extends beyond the images of Sappho herself to the other women of the *Heroides*, their “female letters” offering a new form of gender disruption for their male author.¹¹⁹ Can we also discover some actualized value for either the real or mythic women within these texts? Can we recover something productive from this appropriation of the Othered, personal voice? I will compare and synthesize the dynamics at play within each, Sappho’s fragments and the *Heroides*, in my concluding section and bring my interrogation back to its origins.

¹¹⁸ I likely would have still questioned whether I had “permission” to use personal voice due my identity as a second-year graduate student, compared with Fränkel’s voice as a Sather Professor of Classical Literature at the University of California, Berkeley (see Rabinowitz 2002, 196 and Zajko 1997, 62).

¹¹⁹ Spentzou 2003, 139.

CONCLUSION: *ILLAE ID OMNINO NIMIS PLANE MEMINERUNT*¹²⁰

As I have demonstrated throughout the preceding chapters, our reactions to the ancient world matter. The field of “classics” has been on a roller-coaster ride throughout modern history in terms of how it approaches ancient relatability. In its bleaker moments, it has used ancient models to directly justify contemporary views, often to the detriment of people less privileged by the modern construct of western civilization and its “ancestors.” In more recent years, the field has attempted to distance itself from this legacy, not only by hyper-emphasizing the importance of reading antiquity in a temporal and contextual vacuum, but also by insisting that classical academia can be apolitical. It has not been my intention to present an argument on this latter issue, as others have devoted their life’s work to doing so.¹²¹ Rather, I have explored how on a smaller scale, modern readership and relatability can be used as a valuable tool of exploring the past.

This ability and willingness to see oneself in something ancient and to chase after those intuitions is what led me to this project and made it possible. I only began searching for literary evidence of therapeutic self-reflection in these ancient texts because of my personal experiences and reactions to those experiences. I wondered whether I could tease out a textual analog to the ruminations of my own mind; what would that look like? Sifting self-reflective thought from everything else seems an utterly futile task, but its written manifestation is much more manageable. Is this not the reason we take to diaries (or letters) when we can no longer parse our own thought processes? The textual markers of such self-reflection eventually showed

¹²⁰ “They remember it all too well.” Reference to Taylor Swift’s 2012 “All Too Well.”

¹²¹ Rabinowitz 2002 argues that “Classics claims to be without a point of view (though it is not)” (194), noting that “much classical scholarship has in fact been interested, but it has not acknowledged that partisanship” (193). She also discusses how both personal voice and feminism require self-questioning and engaging with one’s identity. See Parks 2019 for a similar take on positionality in biblical scholarship (53), as well as Schüssler Fiorenza 1999, whose “ethics of interpretation” Parks highlights (195–198).

themselves and I found myself ever the more encouraged by that initial recognition I found in Sappho, Catullus, and Ovid's heroines. This relatability is valid. At a time when classics is necessarily being weighed for its value to all people living today, the consideration of modern relevancy is crucial. Through this project, I have found that it is possible to responsibly and soundly include oneself in the methodological process. We can listen to those reactions and gut-feelings when we read texts so long as we are aware of them. It is important to remind ourselves that everyone listens to such intuition more than they realize and so it is doubly crucial to consciously consider our positionalities.¹²²

Beyond these broader issues of studying antiquity today, my musings about personal reactions to ancient literature led me to interrogate literary personal voice in general, both my own and those of the poets I was reading. This open-mindedness towards the personal prompted my reconsideration of the oft-dismissed ancient personal voice and its value as a literary technique. I consciously chose a more personal writing style for this project because it best suited my content and purposes, just as Sappho preferred an intimately personal voice for her emotional poetry. Catullus and Ovid, including the latter's mythological heroines, followed suit because they recognized the worth and significance of this literary choice for their own priorities. Personal voice and self-reflection are not arbitrary components of these texts, to be dismissed as deceiving and ineffective avenues to getting at the biography of an author. These choices are intentional artistry that impact the reading experience of audiences ancient and modern.

We do not seem to question the presence of such aesthetics in modern verse, but I argue that we should. As I discussed in my first chapter, the effective use of personal voice is not automatic but actively contributes to the listener's response. How this lyrical choice affects the

¹²² Here I reference my discussions of Hallett's and Lardinois' arguments in Chapter 1, as well as the previous note.

piece overall varies amongst artists and songs; I spent three chapters investigating the presence and manifestation of literary self-reflection in three ancient authors, but there is still much to consider regarding the implications of this phenomenon. As I queried at the end of my third chapter, what do lyric memorialization and epistolary self-reflection achieve, beyond modern reader relatability? Any real attempt to answer this question deserves its own dedicated project, but I will use the next few pages to entertain one such conclusion.

In addition to vision, the invocation of memory emerged as a prominent marker of literary self-reflection. In Sappho's fragments, the poetics of memory combine with the vivid gaze and authorial presencing to memorialize pleasant, longed-for scenes of the speaker's past. These scenes are characterized by wistful yearning, the desire for the absent beloved emerging as a positive result of remembering. The speaker does not offer any blame towards the object of these memories. Even if the memories are *γλυκύπικρον* for Sappho, her memorializing highlights the sweetness of love. Ovid's *Heroides*, on the other hand, are almost entirely characterized by anger. While the heroines also engage with memory through vision, calling to mind and page vividly detailed scenes of shared words and embraces, the anecdotes, both bitter and sweet, pile up as damning evidence of the addressee's crimes.

Such abundance and the resulting length of the *Heroides* has historically been used to dismiss the letters as repetitive and tiresome. Duncan Kennedy observes this "determinedly masculine condescension [that] pervade[s] this lengthy episode of the poems' reception" and suggests more nuanced ways of reading Ovid's literary choices.¹²³ In line with Kennedy's approximation of the situation, I cannot help but observe a tiredness with female complaint in these scholars' apparent exhaustion upon reading the *Heroides*. Personally, I find many ancient

¹²³ Kennedy 2002, 219–220. Fränkel 1969 also succinctly responds to the idea that there is too much repetition in the *Heroides*: "But it is our own mistake if we read elegies in bulk" (41).

texts “repetitive” both upon first and second readings; singling out one of the few examples of extended female expression as such seems to again reveal a modern bias that is disguising itself as objective and dis-engaged.

Pared-down versions of the *Heroides* do not exist, nor should they; their length was yet another choice Ovid made while composing these epistolary grievances. Clearly, modern expectations are different, as evidenced by the two versions of “All Too Well” that show up on Taylor Swift’s re-recorded album, *Red (Taylor’s Version)*. Clocking in at 5:29 and 10:13, respectively, the original cut and its fully realized form illustrate the difference made by such an unglamorous quality as track length. The ten-minute version of the song is arguably too long, much akin to the meandering, too-long-for-a-real-letter *Heroides*. Lindsay Zoladz writes: “For the elegant simplicity of its structure, the shorter version of ‘All Too Well’ is by far the better song. But the power of the new version comes from its unapologetic messiness, the way it allows a woman’s subjective emotional experience to take up a defiantly excessive amount of time and space.”¹²⁴ While the five-minute version certainly appealed to Swift’s record-label, likely concerned that a ten-minute song would not be well received, what is the purpose of this messy indulgence of emotion and memory?

Zoladz suggests a function of weaponization for Swift’s song. The memories become ammunition against “an unfeeling and perhaps manipulatively disbelieving ex, that this experience really happened.”¹²⁵ In other words, “All Too Well” is a record of defense against gaslighting. The “addressee” of the song has undoubtedly heard the track and likely recognized

¹²⁴ Zoladz 2021. We must check ourselves before exclaiming that Ovid is similarly liberatory in giving such extended voices to the women of the *Heroides*. See Lindheim 2003, who argues that he prevents the heroines from seizing the opportunities afforded by the epistolary genre and instead promotes further “self-marginalization.” Fränkel 1969 also sees only a half-hearted attempt to grant conversational agency to the letters: “Poetic exploitation of a twilight existence was in line with Ovid’s particular gift” (46).

¹²⁵ Zoladz 2021.

himself as the antagonist. The song's message has been delivered and he has not responded, at least publicly; it functions as a read, and unanswered, letter. As many have established, most of the *Heroides* could never have reached their intended recipients as letters. The memories and evidence gathered within remain forever unread by the very men who, supposedly, are the most crucial readers. Is a reaction to abandonment worthless if unheard? As I have demonstrated, this literary self-reflection is most important for the writer herself. It becomes a site of meditation akin to Sappho's memorializing desire but does not necessarily remain a space to which the heroine wants to return. She can only reflect so much without getting closure. Instead of a continual and perpetual presencing of the self through these letters, they become an act of active therapy and self-validation. Just like the stones and trees that bear the heroines' indelible inscriptions, the letters themselves assert that "this experience really happened."¹²⁶ They partake in the *release* that Purves suggested, but in the hopes that the painful remembering will not need to be *renewed*.

During its first live performance, Swift prefaced the extended version of "All Too Well" with an assertion that, while originally about a relationship, the song has become wholly about the fans who have breathed new life into it.¹²⁷ I interpret her re-definition of the track's subject as a re-orientation of the purpose of its personal voice and self-reflection. The speaker sings that she is "in a new hell every time you double-cross my mind," suggesting that her memory of this specific person from her past repeatedly re-enters her imagination and tortures her.¹²⁸ As I discussed in my first chapter, the historicity of Swift's songwriting is not what originally

¹²⁶ *Her.* 2.147–148, 7.195–196, 14.128–130, and 15.183–184. Ramsby 2007 suggests that "Ovid repeatedly imagines women in the position of leaving indelible marks on the world in which they live, and rendering permanence to the sentiments and the circumstances of their lives" (107).

¹²⁷ Zoladz 2021.

¹²⁸ Swift 2021.

appealed to me and her millions of other fans. It is not the reason the song became an underrated favorite amongst her listeners. It was, and is, the specificity itself that becomes relatable, the vivid memorialization of pain that we would rather forget. Swift's lyrical suffering became our own, inflicted by our own memories, with the public nature of her performance emerging as a catharsis withheld from us—our own unread letters, literal or not, that record our gaslit grievances embodied in the song heard by billions.

In the end, it does not matter, especially now, that “All Too Well” is autobiographical. It does not matter whether Sappho's fr. 31 was autobiographical. The significance of the original characters and events recorded within these songs has been overcome not only by the passing of time, but also by the reclamation of memory. Swift has a new purpose for her re-released song: to connect to her listeners. The women of Ovid's *Heroides* discover a new purpose in composing letters: to record and weaponize their painful experiences. The compositions overlap in the vividness of their remembered trauma and the sheer quantity of recorded memories, demanding that these experiences not be forgotten or dismissed as insignificant.¹²⁹ These literary effects are not an accident, nor are they the automatic result of intimate subject matter. While we may still struggle to reconcile the violent and appropriating Ovid of *Heroides* 15 with the seemingly feminist and liberatory Ovid of *Heroides* 5 and 17, the power of literary self-reflection persists. In fact, the dramatically different readings of these two texts demonstrate the interpretive range within literary self-reflection. The legacies of these works have flourished and persisted due to their ability to relate to readers, regardless of the authors' intentions. The literary personal voice and poetics of self-reflection trigger a familiarity of human experience, of pleasure and pain, of the bitter and the sweet.

¹²⁹ Spentzou 2003 observes a similar “discourse of subversions” in the very writing of the letters. She sees their composition as defiance against those in power, the men who control their lives, abandon them, or both (3).

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