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Use of Sublime Landscapes : An Eco-feminist Perspective of Sappho's Poetry.

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Abstract

Sappho was born probably about 620 BCE to an aristocratic family on the island of Lesbos during a great cultural flowering in the area. Apparently her birthplace was either Eressos or Mytilene, the main city on the island, where she seems to have lived for some time. In antiquity Sappho was regularly counted among the greatest of poets and was often referred to as "the Poetess," just as Homer was called "the Poet." Plato hailed her as "the tenth Muse," and she was honored on coins and with civic statuary.

Sappho was not an epic poet, rather she composed lyrics: short, sweet verses on a variety of topics from hymns to the gods, marriage songs, and mini-tales of myth and legend. She also sung of desire, passion and love – mostly directed towards women – for which she is best known.Sappho's definition of beauty – that which a person loves – privileges the individual over the community. Apart from her fascination with the theme of love, Sappho contributed in other ways to the conventions of the lyric genre.

Sappho's poetry abounds in natural imagery. Floral motifs recur aplenty. Nature is a key component in her aesthetics, since through it she explores the tranquility one can experience in moments of great visual beauty. The paper aims to explore all the measures and prove that female aesthetics and nature are two inseparable elements in Sappho's poetry. The paper aims to prove that lyrical poetry and Nature are inseparable, and thus both contribute to the aesthetics of art and literature. Sappho love for nature and women is inseparable. She believes that Nature and women are two aspects of the same phenomenon.

Key Words : Aesthetics, Imagery, Nature, Love, Greek, Lyrical, Eco-feminism. Natural. etc..

Introduction:

Sappho was a prolific poet, known for her lyrics . She has written more than 1000 poems.She is a classical Greek poet known for for her love poetry; other themes in the surviving fragments of her work include family and religion. She probably wrote poetry for both individual and choral performance. Most of her best-known and best-preserved fragments explore personal emotions and were probably composed for solo

performance. Her works are known for their clarity of language, vivid images, and immediacy.Sappho was regularly counted among the greatest of poets and was often referred to as "the Poetess," just as Homer was called "the Poet." Plato hailed her as "the tenth Muse," and she was honored on coins and with civic statuary.

In literary history and critical theory, Sappho's greatest importance is to be found in her contribution to the idea of the lyric genre. Her work, which claims to be direct, impassioned, and simple and which is addressed to a circle of close friends and lovers rather than being impersonal or directed at connoisseurs, has significantly influenced the evolution of poetry. Her celebration of love has reechoed through the centuries not only in the work of translators and direct imitators, but also in all those other voices that have dared declare their love to be radically important, more compelling and serious than abstract notions of truth or justice or piety. At the same time Sappho reminds modern readers of poetry's roots in magic and religion while occupying a firm place in Greek literary history as a metrical inventor and an expert practitioner of her art.

Sapphic stanzas are made up of any number of four-line stanzas, and many Greek and Roman poets, including Catullus, used the form. It was introduced to Roman and European poets by Horace, who frequently used sapphics in his *Odes*, and later became popular as a verse form for hymns during the Middle Ages. Modern Sapphics have been written by Ezra Pound, John Frederick Nims, and Anne Carson.he main building blocks of the sapphic are trochees and dactyls. The trochee is a metrical foot with one stressed syllable followed by an unstressed one, while the dactyl contains a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed ones. The first three lines of the sapphic contain two trochees, a dactyl, and then two more trochees. The shorter fourth, and final, line of the stanza is called an "Adonic" and is composed of one dactyl followed by a trochee. However, there is some flexibility with the form as when two stressed syllables replace both the second and last foot of each line.

Sappho wrote her poems in the service of Aphrodite, favoring themes of love and beauty. While scholars have frequently discussed the priority of desire (*eros*)within her poetry, analysis of beauty *qua* beauty has remained but a footnote. Sappho uses of the word ‘beautiful’ (*kalos*) which holds together in meaning both physical attractiveness and ethical virtue. Her use of natural imagery, as an adjacent aesthetic language, creates a paradisiacal space for contemplation. Objects of adornment are instrumental to remembering youth and love.

Sappho is a poet who uses language as a medium to describe the commonality between female world and Nature. Her love for co-female friends is described through the world of Nature.Sappho’s poetry is largely female-centric.Her poetry focuses primarily on women and on occasions where women are the primary agents of action.

Discussion:

Ecofeminism, like the social movements it has emerged from, is both political activism and intellectual critique. Bringing together feminism and environmentalism, ecofeminism argues that the domination of women and the degradation of the environment are consequences of patriarchy and capitalism. Any strategy to address one must take into account its impact on the other so that women's equality should not be achieved at the expense of worsening the environment, and neither should environmental improvements be gained at the expense of women. Indeed, ecofeminism proposes that only by reversing current values, thereby privileging care and cooperation over more aggressive and dominating behaviors, can both society and environment benefit.

The notion that women's and environmental domination are linked has been developed in a number of ways. A perspective in which women are accredited with closer links with nature was celebrated in early ecofeminist writings.French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne coined the term "*ecological feminisme*" in 1974 to call attention to women's potential to bring about an ecological revolution. Initially, "ecofeminism" referred generically to a wide variety of "women-nature" connections.Cultural/Spiritual Ecofeminism emphasises on the natural connection between women and natureas exclusive and unique and supports the concept of „Mother Earth" and „femininity of nature".They argue that traditional wisdoms of preserving and protecting nature as well as respecting women should be practiced in our contemporary society.Mary Daly, who is a radical lesbian feminist, in her much critically acclaimed book Gyn/ecology analyzes the concept of femininity, its origin and roots. She explains, with the help of theology,that how notions of virtuous womanhood have arrived and perpetuated which forms the basis of patriarchy. Suasan Griffin and Starhawk write on the spiritual woman-nature connections.Queer Ecofeminism envisions a wide spectrum of gender ranging from superman to superwoman,including lesbians, gay, bisexuals, transgenders and cyborgs, and emphasize their connection towards environment. In the essay "Toward a queer ecofeminism", Greta Gaard points out that:

> The goal of this essay is to demonstrate that to be truly inclusive, any theory of Ecofeminism must take into consideration the findings of queer theory. Similarly, queer theory must consider the findings of ecofeminism. To this end, the essay examines various intersections between ecofeminism and queer theory, there by demonstrating that a democratic, ecological society envisioned as the goal of ecofeminism will, of necessity, be a society that values sexual diversity and the erotic. (137)

Ecofeminists suggest that the connection between women and nature is deeper than similarity of oppression and that this connection between women and the earth can be reclaimed in a way that is empowering. These feminists believe in a connection between women and nature, and that this connection does not necessarily have to be a source of oppression, while others will argue that the connection is

entirely socially constructed and that we should resist any suggestion of inherent connection between women and natureThere are parallels between the treatment of women and the treatment of the natural world and it is these connections which necessitated the construction of an environmental philosophy that takes these similarities into account. Noël Sturgeon in "Ecofeminist Natures:Race, Gender, Feminist Theory, and Political Action", explores how the ecofeminist movement began and the issues that were most at the heart of its inception. This group of ecofeminist women wanted to establish clearly why environmentalism and feminism were so inherently linked to one another.

Certain feminists argue that this connection is entirely socially constructed, and that it's existence can do nothing but perpetuate oppression . On the other hand, other feminists, sometimes referred to as "nature feminists," propose that women are inherently more connected to the natural world than their male counterparts and oppose the idea that, just because this relationship between women and nature has traditionally been used oppressively, doesn't mean that this is necessarily the case. These ecofeminists believe that "[W]omen are closer to nature but disagree that the association must be disempowering" (48). They believe that the fact that women and nature are the source of life enables them to connect more deeply to nature, and that women's bodies are more affected by the natural world than are men through things like the moon. This distinction between these two classes of ecofeminism has also been characterized as "spiritual ecofeminism" and "social ecofeminism."connection between women and the natural world is purely the result of social construction.Spiritual ecofeminists, on the other hand, insist that "people are intrinsically connected to nature,and that this connection is most powerful for women" (342).

Sappho's poetry is female centric.Her poetry focuses primarily on women and on occasions where women are the primary agents of action. As Stehle argues, "Sappho tries to create an alternative female world, where the female experience,the female voice, and relationships between women are explored instead of the traditional male-centered themes"(245).Several fragments invoke female deities— Aphrodite and Hera—and appear to have been meant to recall female ritual contexts and occasions. Indeed, ritual and religion are some of the most common themes in Sappho's work, and serve as the primary contexts in which Sappho is portrayed as interacting with other women in a meaningful manner. Where male sources tend to characterize female relationships and particularly female conversations as frivolous and dedicated to domestic, trivial, and erotic topics, Sappho shows women's relationships as profound, deeply felt friendships or erotic/sexual relationships in which women have the opportunity to participate in collective ritual action that is important both to themselves and to the society.

The poetry of Sappho abounds in natural imagery. Floral motifs recur aplenty. Nature is a key component in Sappho's aesthetics, since through it she explores the tranquility one

can experience in moments of great visual beauty. “Fragment 2” is a particular instance ofcreating a world that uses her aesthetic language to the fullest. . It is steeped in the splendour of natural beauty, unusually so for a hymn. Drawing out the significance of this landscape is not straightforward. In analyzing the imagery and setting of this poem, we find that Sappho uses a complex combination of symbols and imagery to create a paradise for herself. Synaesthetic elements of the poem illustrate instances of beauty creating tranquility. In Sappho, even nature can be luxurious. The poet uses ritual aspects of the grove to imbue the natural world with religious beauty. Further, this place of beauty brings together the divine, mortal, and natural worlds. That Sappho sings the place into being emphasizes the effects of a beautiful song.

. Sappho favours the epithet “violet-lapped” or “violet-robed”, singing “might sing of your dearness with the violet-robed bride” (fr. 30.4-5). This maybe a shorthand for Sappho to refer to a bridal gown. The “daughter of the son Kronos”is also violet-robed (fr. 103). Finally, roses occur in abundance. There are the roses of Pieria which stand for the Muses. Roses bloom in “Fragment 96” along with other flowers and are braided in a wreath with violets and crocuses in “Fragment 94”. Goddesses are rose-armed: “rose-armed, holy Graces” (fr. 53), and rose-armed Dawn carries Tithonus, “rose-armed Dawn” (; fr. 58.9).

The moon, similarly, is “rose-fingered” (fr.96.8). The recurrence of these floral motifs is important because, as Irwin writes, in early poetrybefore the boundaries between senses had been firmly established, these “prompt us to think of the delicacy, fragrance and beauty of women’sskin.” Irwin sees in flowers a“continuum of the natural and divine world,” a “kinship” in which the realms are understood as shared and familiar. In Sappho, flowers are emblematic of this connection.

“In Fragment 2”, Sappho’s aesthetic language animates her poetry at its fullest. Nature is resplendent:

Come tome from Crete to this hallowed
temple, where stands your graceful grove
of apple trees, the altars smoking
with frankincense.

And in this place, cold water murmurs through boughs
of an apple tree; with roses, the place is shadowed
all over; from quivering leaves
a dream daze slips down.

And in this place, the horse-grazing meadow has bloomed
with springtime flowers, and breezes

sweetly blow

Here you taking […], Cypris,
in golden cups delicately,
pour out
nectar mixing with festivities(100)

Beginning with a beckoning to a goddess, the poet asks the unnamed divinity to come to the grove in which a temple to her stands. The grove is resplendent with flowers, shaking aves, apple trees, and a stream runs through the middle. In the the last stanza, it seems Cypris has arrived and is then asked by the poet to mix nectar with festivities in an unusual combination of imagery.Sappho takes great care to show the abundance and fullness of nature in "Fragment 2". The natural world springs to life in metaphorical and imagistic splendour. Thus a sense is created that Nature and female have divine connections.

There is also divine motion in this poem. The speaker beseeches Aphrodite to hurry to the temple, indicating motion towards, with the rising smoke acting as beacon. The shadow spreading from the roses is mimicked by the outwardly blooming meadow, and in between these the coma/trance falls. Movement is in all directions, inwards with Aphrodite's coming, spreading outwards from the flowers and even all around as the winds blow. We might even infer that the leaves are flickering happily in this breeze.

The poet inundates the listener with this barrage of sensorial imagery, creating a synaesthetic effect of overabundant beauty and engulfs the listener with an experience of this natural environment. The scent of the roses mix with frankincense, and their dense coarse meadow grass, the flower petals, and metallic-smooth cups, can all be felt .

.It is important that we examine the nature of the beauty which encloses all this imagery. Worman writes that poetic landscapes :

> tend to foreground their physical in habitation,privileging a viewer […] of the setting's features and thereby promoting the poet-performer's […] skills. These are thus not neutral spaces, since they are always bound up with aesthetic negotiations that open out onto ethical and political valuations.(45)

Sappho's creative power is already clear; her poetry can contain abundant beauty in the form of ideal representation of nature. Although "Fragment 2"does not explicitly discuss Sappho's friendships or relationships with other mortal women, it does portray a ritualistic context that represents the type of setting where such friendships may have been formed and strengthened through participation in religious activity. The poem's vocabulary is religious, naturalistic, and feminine, appropriate for an enjoyable ritual

conducted by women somewhere outside the city in an isolated, natural setting.The imagery also continues to be feminine: the delicacy and beauty of the roses and the fertility and fruitfulness implied by the apples reflect the "themes of feminine grace and beauty" found in several other of Sappho's poems .

In "Fragment 81" Sappho again uses naturalistic, ritualistic vocabulary to urge her female companion, Dika, to make herself pleasing to the Graces:

> Out you, O Dika, bind your hair with lovely crowns,
>
> tying stems of anise together in your soft hands.
>
> For the blessed Graces prefer to look on one who wears flowers
>
> and turn away from those without a crown. (157)

First, by looking at the stems of anise. Anise is an annual herb which is "cultivated chiefly for its fruit, called aniseed, which tastes like licorice" ("Anise.") we see a sharp connection to nature since stems of anise are a direct product of nature. The fact that anise tastes like licorice brings a particularly important tie to nature since anise can be used to bring out sensual behaviors in people, which is our primordial self springing forth. Furthermore, since anise is an annual herb, it has to release new seeds every year for it to continue existing. An individual anise plant is not permanent; rather, through the production of seeds can this species survive. This closely parallels Ortner's statement that as an anise plant has to reproduce annually, so does a woman have to "create perishables – human beings"Which leads to my conclusion that woman are essentially bound to nature due to the process of reproduction.The idea that women serve a dual purpose: of which they are more closely connected to nature and serve as the transitional step from nature to culture.

"Fragment 81" thus again evokes a ritual context, in which Sappho and her companion Dika are preparing to worship the Graces.This is the only extant poem that names Dika as one of Sappho's female companions. Because she does not appear in any other fragments, it is difficult to understand their relationship. Sappho expresses a great deal of affection towards Dika: she calls her hands "delicate" or "tender" as a kind of endearment, and implies

that not only the garlands, but also the girl herself is "lovely" .

It thus makes more sense to consider Dika a member of Sappho's "social network."She would have participated in common religious and social activities and formed meaningful relationships with Sappho and the other women in her group. The ritual evoked in this poem is an example of one context where such relationships could have been maintained. As Stehle notes, "the women in such networks may have aided each other not only in celebrating rituals but also in such matters as pregnancy, childbirth, and protection against male abuse (2)". These networks would have been instrumental in helping to create the "women's subculture" that Sappho is trying to construct in her poems.

In "Fragment 96" Sappho again depicts meaningful female relationships in ritualistic language and vivid imagery that suggests a context similar to that described in "Fragment 2".

She comforts a female friend who thinks longingly of her departed companion, Atthis.

often holding her thoughts here:

Sardis:
just as…we…
you, like a goddess undisguised,
yet your song delighted her most. (122)

The first line mentions Sardis, the capital city of Lydia where the absent woman mentioned later in the poem has presumably gone. Sappho says that her friend often thinks of the place, presumably yearning for the company of Atthis. Indeed, Atthis is mentioned in several of Sappho's fragments: 8, 49a, 131, 214c, and 256.

Sappho invokes a kind of communal memory and experience, one in which she, Atthis, and the addressee would have all had a part. In the next line, she uses the religious term (goddess) to describe her addressee, implying that she has deep admiration for theAmanda woman. The comparison of her companion to a goddess also reinforces the ritualistic imagery found throughout the remainder of the poem, as does the reference to song. Regardless, singing would have been an important part of both public and private rituals and religious gatherings. Stanzas 3 and 4 continue to employ religious vocabulary, though the words become more sensuous and reminiscent of popular mythological imagery.

Now she stands out among
Lydian women as after sunset
the rose-fingered moon
exceeds all stars. Moonlight
reaches equally over the brine sea
and fields of many flowers.(88)

The reference to Lydian women complements the evocation of Sardis in line 1, and makes it clear that Atthis has left Lesbos and now lives, in all of her beauty and splendor, among strangers. Sappho's use of the adjective(rosy-fingered) is intriguing, as the epithet is traditionally used in Homer and Hesiod to refer to the Dawn .

By using this word to describe the moon, Sappho may be evoking the Homeric tradition but also modifying it to fulfill her own poetic objective of creating a unique, private, woman-centered world that takes precedence over the male-centered world of war and politics evoked in epic poetry. Atthis is compared to the moon and outshines the stars, astrological phenomena mentioned frequently in Homer. While these lines emphasize the distance that separates Sappho's friend from Atthis, the familiar delicate, fruitful, ritualistic imagery suggests that this poem is evoking memories of a religious context. Perhaps Sappho wants her friend to recall a sacred grove or similar space where she and Atthis used to spend time participating in rituals and enjoying each other's company. The final two stanzas continue the ritualistic imagery, but also bring Sappho's companion and her strong feelings for Atthis to the center.

In the beautiful fallen dew,
roses, delicate chervil,
and honey clover bloom.
Pacing far away, her gentle heart
devoured by powerful desire,
she remembers slender Atthis. (101)

The dew, roses, chervil, and honey clover referred to in these stanzas all have either ritualistic connotations or explicit religious functions, and would likely have been present at the kind of private, female-only religious rituals that Sappho invokes here and elsewhere in her poems. The dew is described as "beautiful" and the chervil as "delicate" adjectives often used to describe women and their features.

Conclusion:

Sappho's poems are filled with declarations of love, longing, and desire. Sappho often makes reference to the beauty of the natural world in her poems, reminding us of its power to inspire and uplift. The theme of most of her poetry is female and nature. She believes that nature and female are two facets of a same coin. Both are beautiful and she uses a term "Kalos" for this beauty. Both are divine and have mysterious qualities and both understand the language of love more clearly and profoundly. Therefore, Sappho being an antique poet is a ecofeminst in her discourse.

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