
CHAPTER FIVE

Keening Sappho

FEMALE SPEECH GENRES IN SAPPHO'S POETRY

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ONE OF the greatest obstacles to our understanding of Sappho's poetry is the lack of similar material to which to compare her work. The work of no other archaic Greek female poet has survived, and that of her male counterparts is of limited value for this purpose, differing from hers both in subject matter and in perspective.¹ There is, however, one relevant body of material that so far has been largely neglected in the study of Sappho's poetry: that of ordinary female speech genres. In a celebrated essay, Tzvetan Todorov has suggested that all literary genres derive from ordinary speech genres.² This seems to hold true in particular for ancient Greece, where the two are sometimes hard to distinguish: one may think, for example, of the *Homeric Hymns*, which are both invocations of the gods and narrative extensions of ordinary prayers.

I argue in this chapter that the poetry of Sappho was closely modeled on the public speech genres of women in ancient Greece. Her poetry is an important testimony to these female speech genres, of which otherwise very little survives, while our understanding of these speech genres can, in turn, help elucidate Sappho's poetry. I examine Sappho's use of three speech genres in particular, which are already represented in the Homeric epics as typically female: prayers to female goddesses, laments, and the praise of young brides. The first of these genres explains Sappho's hymns to the gods; the other two, I argue, are incorporated in Sappho's wedding songs. A recognition of Sappho's use of these speech genres will throw a new light on her poetry, in particular fragments 1, 2, 16, 31, 94, and 96.³

¹ See, for example, Stigers [Stehle] 1981 and Williamson [1995] 1996.

² Todorov [1975] 1990.

³ All fragments and testimonia of Sappho, Corinna, Telesilla, Praxilla, and the other lyric poets are cited from Campbell's edition in the Loeb Classical Library (1982–93), unless noted otherwise. The epigrams of Anyte, Erinna, Moiro, and Nossis are cited from Page 1975, the *Distaff* of Erinna and Melinno's "Roma" from Lloyd-Jones and Parsons 1983. Translations are based loosely on those of Campbell (1982–93) and Rayor (1991).

PRAYERS TO FEMALE DEITIES

In Homer's *Iliad*, Hecuba leads the old women of Troy in a procession to the temple of Athena, where they offer the goddess a woven *peplos* ("robe") and pray for the safety of the city. In a more private ritual, Penelope in the *Odyssey* sacrifices to Athena on behalf of her son, and, when all seems to be lost, prays to Artemis to make an end to her life.⁴ Greek women seem to have venerated the female gods in particular. They played an important role in the public worship of these goddesses and were encouraged to see their own lives reflected in their different manifestations. A Greek woman's life could be described as a transition from the state of Artemis (*parthenos* or girl) to Aphrodite (*nymphē* or marriageable young woman) to Hera (*gunē* or wife) and Demeter (*mētēr* or mother).⁵ The same gender identification is reflected in the different swearing formulas for men and women: Greek men usually swore by male gods, while Greek women invoked various female deities, such as "the Two" (Demeter and Persephone).⁶

Among the fragments attributed to the women poets are several hymns and prayers addressed, with very few exceptions, to female goddesses. There are hymns and prayers to Aphrodite (Sappho frs. 1, 2, 15, 33, 86, 134), including songs about Adonis (Sappho frs. 140a, 168; Praxilla fr. 747), to Aphrodite and the Nereids (Sappho fr. 5), to Artemis (Telesilla fr. 717; Nossis 12; cf. Sappho test. 21 and 47), to Hera (Sappho fr. 17), to the Graces (Sappho fr. 53), to the Muses (Sappho frs. 124, 127), to the Graces and the Muses (Sappho frs. 103.8, 128), and to Roma (Melinno fr. 541). In addition there are a number of dedicatory poems for female deities among the epigrams of Anyte, Nossis, and Moiro (Anyte 1–3; Nossis 3–6; Moiro 1 and 2).

There are exceptions: the fragments of Sappho and Telesilla include traces of hymns to Apollo (Sappho frs. 99, 208?; Telesilla frs. 718 and 719), and Alcman's *partheneia* show that it was possible for male poets to compose hymns to goddesses for performances by female voices as well. Still, the many fragments of the women poets addressed to goddesses suggest that the women poets were largely restricted, or restricted themselves, to hymns that commemorated these deities. In the following paragraphs I examine some of the hymns by Sappho and try to determine if they reveal the same

⁴ *Il.* 6.286–311; *Od.* 4.759–67, 18.201–5. For these and other religious activities of women in the Homeric epics, see Wickert-Micknat 1982: 22–38.

⁵ For the worship of female deities by Greek women and the life stages they represent, see, among others, Calame [1977] 1997: 91–141; Bremmer 1994: 69–83; and Josine Blok's contribution to this volume. On Demeter as a prototypical mother figure, see also Foley 1994: 79–137.

⁶ Bain 1984: 39–42; Sommerstein 1995: 64–68; see also Laura McClure's introduction and Josine Blok's contribution to this volume.

relationship between the goddesses and ordinary women as suggested by the Homeric epics, the public worship of female deities, or the Greek swearing formulas.

As the list above shows, there are a great number of hymns to female goddesses among the fragments of Sappho. First of all, there are the remnants of a song about Adonis (frs. 140a, 168), which seems to have been part of a public celebration of the Adonia, a typical women's festival.⁷ According to the Hellenistic poet Dioscorides (*Anth. Pal.* 7.407 = Sappho test. 58), Sappho could be heard "lamenting with Aphrodite" as she mourned the young Adonis. This situation is exactly what we find in fragment 140a, except that it is not Sappho herself but a chorus of young women that laments with the goddess. The first line of the fragment is apparently spoken by a group of girls, to whom someone impersonating the goddess responds in the following line:

—καθνάσκει, Κυθήρη', ἄβρος Ἄδωνις· τί κε θεῖμεν;
—καττύπτεσθε, κόραι, καὶ κατερείκεσθε κίθωνας.

"Delicate Adonis is dying, Cytherea, what are we to do?"
"Beat your breasts, girls, and tear your clothes."

Beating one's breasts and tearing one's clothes were typical gestures of lament in ancient Greece.⁸ In fragment 168 the mournful address of Adonis is preserved: ὦ τὸν Ἄδωνιν ("o that Adonis"). What is interesting about these fragments is the close connection between the young women and the goddess: they engage in dialogue, and in their grief over Adonis the young women identify with the goddess, who herself displays a mortal weakness in her mourning for the dead.⁹

In another poem (fr. 2), Sappho summons Aphrodite to her temple in a grove of apple trees. In this shrine the goddess is asked to "pour gracefully into golden cups nectar that is mingled with the festivities" (fr. 2.14–16), to which Athenaeus adds, in a likely imitation of Sappho's next line, which is missing, "for my companions (ἑταίροις) and yours."¹⁰ If such words were part of Sappho's poem, the hymn was probably sung by a chorus of young

⁷ Versnel 1990: 103–5, with earlier bibliography; Winkler 1990b; Bremmer 1994: 80; Simms 1998.

⁸ Alexiou 1974: 8. See also Figure 3 in this volume (p. 105). A group of young women (κόραι) is similarly addressed in a fragment of Telesilla (fr. 717), which may have been part of a hymn to Artemis.

⁹ Compare Helene Foley's remarks about Demeter's grief in the *Hymn to Demeter* (Foley 1994: 88–91), and contrast, for example, Artemis' reaction to the death of Hippolytus in Eur. *Hipp.* 1397 and 1437–39.

¹⁰ Athenaeus 11.463e, also quoted by Campbell ([1982] 1990: 58). Athenaeus' words were identified as a possible imitation of Sappho by West (1970: 317 n. 25).

women, who would have referred to each other as *betairai*.¹¹ What is remarkable is the claim of these young women also to be the “companions” of Aphrodite and the degree of intimacy suggested by the goddess pouring nectar for them. This gesture brings Aphrodite close to the mortals she serves, while elevating the celebrants to the status of gods who feast on nectar.¹² Both this hymn to Aphrodite and the previous song for Adonis suggest an intimate relationship between the goddess of love and young women, who were probably meant to adopt her as a model for their own budding sexuality.¹³

Sappho claims some of the same intimacy with Aphrodite in her “personal” poetry. I put quotation marks around the word “personal” because, like all archaic Greek poetry, these songs were probably composed for public performances. The most famous example of Sappho’s “personal” poetry is fragment 1. The speaker in this poem is Sappho herself, whose name is mentioned in line 20. She prays to Aphrodite to help her with a young woman who spurns her love.¹⁴ What is remarkable about this poem is Sappho’s assertion that the goddess previously had appeared to her face-to-face. She even quotes the words Aphrodite spoke to her (fr. 1.18–24) and thus, in performance, Sappho’s voice would blend with that of the goddess. Sappho’s claim of a face-to-face meeting with the goddess may well be a purely literary assertion, but it suggests the same intimate relationship between the goddess and ordinary women as shown in her song for Adonis or fragment 2.¹⁵

We may compare Sappho fragment 1 to a similar poem by Anacreon (fr. 357). Anacreon prays to the god Dionysos to come and persuade a young

¹¹ On female chorus members referring to themselves as *betairai* (“companions”), see Calame [1977] 1997: 33–34 and [1992] 1999: 98–99 (on Sappho’s circle); cf. Sappho fr. 160, which I believe to be a choral fragment as well. On Sappho fr. 2 as probably choral, see Williamson 1995: 140; Lardinois 1996: 165; Aloni 1997: li; and Stehle 1997: 287.

¹² One may again compare the figure of Demeter, who in the *Hymn to Demeter* serves as a nurse to the mortal child Demophoön. Foley (1994: 88) observes that this humanizes the goddess and prepares for her role in the Mysteries.

¹³ Aphrodite was particularly associated with rituals for older girls and young brides: Calame [1977] 1997: 123–28, 141; cf. Sappho fr. 112. It is further worth noting that in Athens and Ephesus a cult has been attested for Aphrodite Hetaira, who was said to bring groups of male and female companions (*betairai*) together: see Lanata [1966] 1996: 15, and Calame 1989: 109 n. 6 for the evidence.

¹⁴ I assume that the woman is young because young women are the subjects of most of Sappho’s songs: see Lardinois 1994. In fact, the sex of Sappho’s beloved in this poem is not entirely certain and rests upon the questionable reading of a single manuscript in line 24; see Most [1995] 1996: 33.

¹⁵ There is some evidence that Sappho fr. 1 is not meant entirely seriously: Page 1955: 12–18; Stanley 1976; cf. Wilson 1996: 29: “This song is an artistic production, not a true confession.” Sappho apparently made the same claim of speaking to the goddess elsewhere in her poetry: frs. 65? (with Campbell’s note, 1982–93: ad loc.), 133b?, 134, 159.

man named Cleobulus to accept him as his lover. While Sappho turns to Aphrodite, Anacreon chooses a male god for his prayer. His choice is undoubtedly influenced by the performance setting of the poem, which was in all likelihood a symposium. Another reason for his choice of Dionysos is that the male poets liked to suggest an affinity between their beloved boys and the gods they invoked.¹⁶ However, as Lyn Heatherly Wilson points out, only in Sappho's poem is the invoked deity said to have appeared in person before the speaker.¹⁷ Sappho may have found the model for such an intimate, personal relationship with the goddess in women's festivals like the Adonia or in her own ritual hymns performed by young women.

Sappho's invocation of predominantly female deities is matched by her choice of myths. Eva Stehle has examined some of the mythological stories Sappho treated in her poetry, and she concludes that they often focus on relationships between a strong female goddess and a weaker mortal man, such as the relationship between Eos and Tithonus, Selene and Endymion, Aphrodite and Adonis, or Aphrodite and Phaon.¹⁸ She argues that these stories allowed Sappho to explore a different kind of sexuality than the one advanced by the dominant culture, in which men dominated and women were supposed to be passive. Her reading shows that, just as in the case of the ritual hymns, the women who sang about these relationships or listened to the songs were encouraged to identify themselves with the goddesses.

Goddesses and heroines also figure prominently in the remainder of Sappho's mythological fragments, which provide more evidence of identification between ordinary women and divine female figures: just as men were compared to male gods and heroes, for example in Sappho's own wedding songs,¹⁹ the speakers in these fragments compare themselves or other women to goddesses and heroines. In fragment 16, the speaker adduces Helen of Troy as example both for herself and for a woman named Anactoria, and in fragment 23 another addressee is compared to Helen.²⁰ In fragment 96, a woman in Lydia is said to be like Selene, and in fragment 142 Leto and Niobe are held up as examples of "dear companions" (φίλαι . . . ἔταιραι), perhaps for the young women in Sappho's choruses who were supposed to establish similar bonds with each other (see above). More speculatively, the wedding of Hector and Andromache in fragment 44 may have

¹⁶ Lardinois 1998b.

¹⁷ Wilson 1996: 32.

¹⁸ Stehle [1990] 1996. See, for example, frs. 58, 199, and 211a–c.

¹⁹ Sappho frs. 105b and 111; see below. There are many more examples in Pindar's *epinikia*.

²⁰ On the dual identification of Helen with the speaker and the laudanda in fr. 16, see Lardinois 1994: 69 n. 48, with earlier bibliography. Add Saake 1972: 72–73; Calame 1987: 218–21; and Segal 1998: 77.

served as a mythological paradigm for a real marriage ceremony, and in fragment 44A the maidenhood for which Artemis prays may reflect the age of the young women who made up Sappho's choruses.²¹

Other mythological figures mentioned in Sappho's poetry are Leda, who is said to have found an egg (fr. 166), Medea (nothing more than her name is preserved in fr. 186), Peitho, whom Sappho identified as the daughter of Aphrodite (fr. 200), and Pandora, whose story Sappho apparently treated as well (fr. 207). It is admittedly hard to see how some of these figures could have served as role models for Sappho's speakers or their addressees, but then we probably would have said the same about Helen of Troy if we did not have the positive identifications with her figure in Sappho fragments 16 and 23. The goddess Aphrodite is, for that matter, not an unproblematic example either: one need only think of her depiction as an adulteress in *Odyssey* 8. I agree with Stehle (above) that Sappho's religious hymns and mythological stories allowed women to explore aspects of their lives and sexuality that were largely ignored in the dominant culture, including male poetry, primarily by identifying them with strong female goddesses and heroines. However, I do not agree that such poetry necessarily would have been considered "subversive."²² The identification of ordinary women with powerful goddesses and heroines may be typical of Sappho's poetry, but it was also part of Greek religion, and most of Sappho's songs that compare ordinary women with goddesses or heroines appear to have been composed for public performances, either by Sappho herself (Fig. 2) or by choruses of young women.²³

LAMENTS

Another important and much-studied speech genre of women in ancient Greece was the lament.²⁴ The most famous example of this speech genre

²¹ Sappho fr. 44 has been identified as a wedding song by Merkelbach 1957: 17; Fränkel [1962] 1973: 174; Rösler 1975; Lasserre 1989: 81–106; and Contiades-Tsitsoni 1990: 102–8; Wilson (1996: 87–94) points out that the emphasis on Artemis' virginity is very strong in fr. 44A and suggests that this virginity may reflect that of the women in Sappho's circle. She, however, seems to follow Holt Parker's suggestion (1993) that Sappho's circle was primarily made up of adult women. For my arguments against this view, see Lardinois 1994.

²² Stehle [1990] 1996: 225.

²³ Lardinois 1996. I argue below that frs. 16 and 96, in which two women are compared to Helen of Troy and Selene, respectively, were composed for wedding ceremonies, while Sappho's hymn to Aphrodite (fr. 2) and the song for Adonis (fr. 140a) were probably composed for public celebrations as well (Page 1955: 42 and 119; Lardinois 1996: 165).

²⁴ See, among others, Reiner 1938; Alexiou 1974; Wickert-Micknat 1982: 18–22; Holst-Warhaft 1992; Foley 1993; Seaford 1994: 74–92; Stears 1998; McClure 1999: 40–47; and Murnaghan 1999.



Fig. 2. The earliest portrait of Sappho, c. 510–500 B.C.E., in a drawing that slightly improves on the original vase-painting. Sappho is shown alone playing a long-armed type of lyre known as a *barbitos*. She is depicted on several Attic vases from the late sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E., demonstrating the widespread popularity of her poetry in this period, but the relevance of these representations for our reconstruction of the “real” Sappho is probably very limited: see Snyder 1997b.

in the women poets is the so-called *Distaff* of Erinna,²⁵ but there are also traces of lament in Sappho’s song for Adonis (fr. 140a, quoted above) and in some of her wedding songs. In fragment 114, a bride addresses her maidenhood in a dialogue reminiscent of Sappho’s song for Adonis:

—παρθενία, παρθενία, ποῖ με λίποις’ ἀποίχη;
 —† οὐκέτι ἤξω πρὸς σέ, οὐκέτι ἤξω †

²⁵ Fr. 401 Lloyd-Jones and Parsons (1983). See Eva Stehle’s contribution to this volume. For more examples, see the epigrams of Anyte discussed in Greene 2000.

“Maidenhood, maidenhood, where have you gone, deserting me?”

“Never again shall I come to you, never again shall I come”

The direct address of the “deceased” and the accusation that he or she “left” or “deserted” the speaker are typical of laments.²⁶ Demetrius, who quotes the two lines, identifies the two speakers as a bride and her maidenhood, and there is more evidence that brides at their wedding could perform laments for themselves.²⁷ Such a custom is not so surprising, since young Greek women were often imagined as “dying” the death of a young girl before being reborn as women (and mothers) in marriage.²⁸

At modern Greek weddings, family and friends of the bride also can sing a lament for the bride.²⁹ An ancient example may be found in one of the stanzas of Catullus 62, an imitation of a Greek wedding song that appears to have been, at least in part, modeled on Sappho’s wedding songs.³⁰ In this poem, a chorus of unmarried young women (*innuptae*) and a chorus of young men (*iuvvenes*) engage each other in a dialogue about the married couple, and at one point the maiden chorus sings:

Evening Star, what more cruel fire than you moves in the sky?
 For you can endure to tear the daughter from her mother’s embrace,
 from her mother’s embrace to tear the close-clinging daughter,
 and give the chaste maiden to the burning youth.
 What more cruel than this do enemies when a city falls?³¹

²⁶ Compare Andromache’s lament for Hector in *Il.* 24.725–26: ἄνερ . . . καὶ δέ με χήρην / λείπεις ἐν μεγάροισι (“Husband, . . . you leave me behind a widow in your halls”), or Theseus’ lament for Phaedra (ἔλυπες, ἔλυπες, ὦ φίλα, “You left me, you left me, dear one,” Eur. *Hipp.* 848). Alexiou (1974: 121) cites two modern Greek wedding laments in which a mother addresses her daughter and bemoans that she is “leaving” her.

²⁷ Demetr. *Eloc.* 140, quoted by Campbell (1982–93: ad loc.). Seaford (1987: 113–14) cites the other evidence. For a modern Greek example, see Alexiou 1974: 121. Bowra (1961: 222) compares Sappho fr. 114 to a Moravian marriage song, in which the bride laments the loss of her “green crown.”

²⁸ Lada-Richards 1999: 57, with earlier bibliography. Add Redfield 1982: 188–91; Foley 1985: 85–89, and 1994: 104; Dowden 1989: esp. 35–37, 47; and Johnston 1999: 218. Redfield (1982: 188–89, 190), Seaford (1987: 107), and Rehm (1994: 29) detail the many similarities between ancient Greek marriage and death rituals: for example, a bride will offer a lock of hair before her marriage, just as mourners do when visiting a grave, and, like a corpse, she is ritually bathed, “covered” or veiled, and driven in a cart to her new home in a procession that includes torchbearers, family, and friends; cf. Danforth (1982: 79) on the similarities between modern Greek wedding and death rituals.

²⁹ Alexiou and Dronke 1971: 848–50; Alexiou 1974: 120–21; Danforth 1982: 74–79; Holst-Warhaft 1992: 41.

³⁰ Bowra 1961: 219–21.

³¹ Catull. 62.20–24. Text and translation after Goold 1988. Seaford (1987: 110–19) argues that Aeschylus’ *Suppliants* dramatizes, in extreme form, the negative attitude of the bride and her female companions toward marriage. The protagonists in this play are also presented as lamenting (Aesch. *Supp.* 69–76, 112–16).

At the beginning of the next stanza, in line 32, the young women complain that “the Evening Star has taken one of us away” (*Hesperus e nobis, aequales, abstulit unam*).³² The two forms of wedding lament, by the bride and by her friends, can also be combined, as may be the case in Sappho fragment 114 (quoted above). If the second line of this fragment was sung by female friends of the bride, they would be bidding her farewell at the same time as she laments the loss of her youth.

John Rauk has compared Erinna’s *Distaff*, in which she mourns the death of a female friend, to fragments 16, 94, and 96 of Sappho, which he has labeled “farewell addresses,” but which others have identified as “consolation songs” or “poems of separation and memory.”³³ I will argue that these fragments in fact represent laments that Sappho herself or young friends of the bride performed at weddings.

Fragment 16 is dedicated to Anactoria, who has been identified as a young woman. Ovid (*Her.* 15.15–17 = test. 19) lists her among the *puellae* (“girls”) of Sappho, and Maximus of Tyre 18.9 (= test. 20) compares her relationship with Sappho to that of Alcibiades, Charmides, or Phaedrus with Socrates.³⁴ Recently, Christopher Brown has argued that Anactoria must have been of marriageable age, because of the “sparkle” (ἀμάρυγμα, 18) in her face, which is paralleled by similar descriptions of young, marriageable women in Hesiod’s *Catalogue of Women*.³⁵ The fragment takes the form of a public praise poem,³⁶ but it also contains elements of lament. It was probably performed by a chorus, which, if my identification of the poem as a

³² This line may contain an allusion to Sappho fr. 104a, especially if the last line of this fragment is read as saying that the Evening Star “leads away the child from its mother”: see Griffith 1989: 56 n. 11, with earlier bibliography. Add Hague 1984: 34.

³³ Rauk 1989; Merkelbach 1957: 12–16; Aloni 1997: lii; see also Burnett 1979 and 1983: 277–313. Merkelbach (1957: 12–13) refers to these poems as *Trostgedichte* (consolation poems) or *Trostlieder* (consolation songs)—“ähnlich wie wir auch heute noch Leidtragende nach einem Todesfall zu trösten . . . suchen” (similar to the way we still try today to console the conflicted after a death). Stehle (Stigers [Stehle] 1981: 55–56) says that they “mourn” the elusiveness of happiness and take as their subject “the loss of the beloved by parting,” comparing them to fr. 140a (the song for Adonis). Rauk (1989: 110) actually refers to fr. 94 as a “lament.”

³⁴ The Suda Σ 107 (test. 2) lists an Anagora, which is probably a corruption of Anactoria’s name (Page 1955: 135 n. 1; Lefkowitz 1981: 64), among the pupils (μαθήτριαι) of Sappho. For the misidentification of Sappho’s young addressees as pupils by later Hellenistic and Roman scholars, see Lardinois 1994: 63–64.

³⁵ Brown 1989. Stehle (1997: 270) objects that Sappho may have used the word differently from the male Greek poets, but this would have to be proven rather than assumed. The erotic vocabulary of Sappho is generally very close to that of her male counterparts: see Lanata [1966] 1996; Carson [1980] 1996; Cavallini 1986; and Calame [1992] 1999: 13–38.

³⁶ For a detailed comparison between Sappho fr. 16 and Pindar’s *epinikia*, see Howie 1977: esp. 209–14. The similarity was already noted by Fränkel ([1924] 1968: 90–93), and by Bundy ([1962] 1986: 5–6).

wedding song is correct, most likely would have been made up of female friends of the bride.³⁷

In the poem, Anactoria is compared to Helen of Troy, a comparison that may seem surprising to us, but that was in fact not uncommon in ancient Greek wedding songs. Lucian (*Symp.* 41) in a mock wedding song likens his bride to Helen, and Sappho fragment 23, in which another woman is compared to Helen, is probably derived from a wedding song as well.³⁸ Despite, or perhaps because of, her many marriages, Helen was often portrayed as the prototypical bride: she is the bride in Theocritus *Idyll* 18 (“Helen’s Epithalamium”) and was regularly depicted as such on Greek wedding vases.³⁹ Helen was also closely associated with death, and her abduction by Paris could be imagined as a descent into the underworld, for example in Euripides’ *Helen*.⁴⁰ This association makes her presence in a mixed wedding/lament song all the more appropriate.

In Sappho fragment 16, Helen is said to have “left” or “deserted” (καλλίποις, 9) her “most valiant husband” (τὸν ἄνδρα / τὸν πανάριστον, 7–8) in order to follow her heart and sail to Troy.⁴¹ The implication is that Anactoria has done the same to the speaker. She can now only conjure up a memory of Anactoria, “who is not here” (με νῦν Ἀνακτορίας ὀνέμναι[σ’ / οὐ] παρεόισας, 15–16). The word καλλίποις, which is used to describe the “desertion” of Helen, is reminiscent of the participle used by the bride

³⁷ For another wedding song, in the same meter, sung by female friends of the bride, see Sappho fr. 30, with the comments of Contiades-Tsitsoni (1990: 100–101). For more evidence that Sappho fr. 16 was part of a choral song, see Lardinois 1996: 166–67, with earlier references.

³⁸ McEvilley 1978: 15 n. 41; Hague 1983: 133.

³⁹ Oakley and Sinos 1993: 13 and 132 n. 16. Charles Segal (1998: 65) remarks concerning her position in *Iliad* book 3: “Helen’s conflicts here approximate (*mutatis mutandis*) those of the bride generally in virilocal marriage, as she experiences the pull between her new household and the house of origin she has left behind.” On Helen’s varied reputation in antiquity, see Nancy Worman’s contribution to this volume. For her association with female rites of passage, see Calame [1977] 1997: 191–202; and Zweig 1999.

⁴⁰ On Helen’s association with death, see Vernant [1985] 1991b: 102; Martin 1995; and Worman in this volume. For the death imagery in Euripides’ *Helen*, see Rehm 1994: 121–27, with earlier bibliography.

⁴¹ I translate τὸν ἄνδρα / τὸν πανάριστον in lines 7–8 as “the most valiant husband,” because I believe that it belongs to the “love versus war” theme that runs through the poem. Helen rejects τὸν ἄνδρα / τὸν πανάριστον for Paris, just as the speaker chooses whom she loves over cavalry, infantry, or ships (1–4). In *Iliad* 3.19, Paris challenges “all the best” (πάντας ἀρίστους) of the Achaeans to fight with him. Menelaus, “dear to Ares” (ἀρηϊφίλος, 3.21, etc.), accepts the challenge and, of course, beats him in the duel, but it is Paris who gets the girl, because Aphrodite “leads” Helen (ἦρχε δὲ δαίμων, 3.420; cf. ἄξεις, 3.401) to his bedroom, just as she appears to be doing in Sappho fr. 16.11–12. It was Aphrodite’s characteristic role at Greek weddings to persuade the bride and lead her to the groom (Seaford 1987: 117).

to address her lost maidenhood (λίποις, fr. 114), and also of Andromache's lament for Hector in *Iliad* 24.725–26 (κάδ δέ με χήρην / λείπεις). Allusions to memory occur frequently in laments,⁴² as does the affirmation that the deceased is no longer here.⁴³ The speaker in fragment 16 mourns the loss of a dear friend, while at the same time acknowledging that she is following her heart.

Fragment 94 reports a dialogue between Sappho and a woman who left her reluctantly (ἄ με ψισδομένα κατελίμπανεν, 2; cf. ἀέκοισ' ἀπυλιμπάνω, 5). Sappho is the speaker of the poem, although the first-person plural in line 8 ("we cared for you" [πεδήγομεν]) suggests that she is not just speaking for herself.⁴⁴ It has been suggested that this woman was a girl who recently had left Sappho's circle in order to get married.⁴⁵ This proposition is quite plausible. As I have argued elsewhere, most of Sappho's songs speak about young women, and the activities of which Sappho reminds the woman in the second half of this poem are compatible with those of a chorus, the most likely organizational form of Sappho's so-called circle.⁴⁶ I would like to add that the poem was probably performed at the young woman's wedding.

There are again traces of lament in this song. Fragment 94 opens with a statement that is common in laments: "Honestly, I wish I were dead."⁴⁷ Scholars are divided as to whether this line is spoken by the girl or by Sappho, and given the fact that both the bride and her former friends could lament at the wedding, both options are possible.⁴⁸ I prefer to give the line

⁴² E.g., *Il.* 24.745 (Andromache's final lament for Hector); cf. Theoc. *Id.* 18.41 ("Helen's Epithalamium"), with Gow's comments ad loc. (Gow 1952, 2: 358). For the role of memory in Greek laments, see Reiner (1938: 12, 16), who cites many examples from Greek tragedy, Skinner (1982: 266), and Holst-Warhaft (1992: 35–37).

⁴³ E.g., *Il.* 24.725 (Andromache's final lament for Hector): ἀπ' οἰῶνος νέος ὄλεο; Eur. *Alc.* 394–95: μαῖα δὴ κάτω βέβακεν, οὐκέτ' ἔστιν (Eumelus' lament for his dead mother); Eur. *Hipp.* 828, *Hec.* 513, *Supp.* 1138 and 1163.

⁴⁴ See Page 1955: 78; du Bois 1995: 140; Lardinois 1996: 163; and Aloni 1997: liv.

⁴⁵ E.g., Merkelbach 1957: 12–13; Rauk 1989: 110; Foley 1994: 135.

⁴⁶ Lardinois 1994: esp. 70–71. On Sappho's circle as made up of choruses of young women, see also Merkelbach 1957; Calame [1977] 1997: 210–14; and Calame 1996.

⁴⁷ Compare *Il.* 22.481 (Andromache's first lament for Hector), 24.764 (Helen's lament for Hector), with Worman's contribution to this volume; Aesch. *Pers.* 915–17; Soph. *El.* 1131, *OC* 1689–90; Eur. *Med.* 1210, *Hipp.* 836–37, *Suppl.* 796. In a lament, this phrase expresses the desire of the mourner to be one with the deceased and the recognition that life without him or her is not worth living. In Sappho fr. 95 we find a more elaborate formulation of this wish, perhaps spoken to Hermes as guide of the souls (Campbell 1982 [1990]: ad loc.).

⁴⁸ Gomme (1957: 255–56), Burnett (1983: 292), Snyder (1989: 26), and Greene ([1994] 1996: 239) assume that the girl speaks the first line, contra Wilamowitz (1913: 50), Page (1955: 82), McEvilly (1971: 4), Saake (1971: 189), Campbell (1983: 226), Rauk (1989: 107), Robbins (1990), and Stehle (1997: 307), who opt for Sappho.

to Sappho. In this case, she would lament the departure of the young woman from her company right before the girl is said to have “left” her (κατελίμπανεν, 2).⁴⁹ This initial lament is followed by another, short lament of the young woman (4–5), and a longer passage (7ff.) in which Sappho reminds her audience how she tried to console the girl (and herself?) at the moment of departure. She asks the girl to remember her (κᾶμεθεν / μέμναισ’, 7–8), and then reminds her (ᾄμναισαι, 10) of all the beautiful things they did together.⁵⁰ There is thus a double moment of remembrance in the poem: first of the conversation Sappho had with the girl when she left, and subsequently of all the pleasant things they did together on previous occasions, like stringing flower-wreaths (12–14), putting on garlands (15–17), wearing perfumes (18–20), and going to holy places (25, 27).⁵¹ As in fragment 16 and in laments in general, memory is what keeps the bond alive between the mourner and the departed.⁵² The whole fragment therefore appears to adopt the form of a lament, although it may well be celebrating at the same time the girl’s imminent marriage.

Fragment 96 could have been considered a real lament for a dead woman, if the reading κ[ᾰ]ρ[ι] σᾰι (“because of your *kēr*”) in line 17 were correct.⁵³ A *kēr* is the bringer of an evil fate, and “almost invariably in fact that of death.”⁵⁴ It is, however, more likely that the letter traces hide an adjective that describes the “desire” (ιμέρω) by which a woman in Lydia is consumed when remembering gentle Atthis.⁵⁵ But even if the fragment therefore does

⁴⁹ The verb καταλιμπάνειν is an alternative present stem of καταλείπειν (“to leave” or “to desert”), which is the verb used of Helen in Sappho fr. 16.9 and of Hector in Andromache’s lament in *Iliad* 24.725–26.

⁵⁰ Sappho fr. 94.9–11. Slings (1994) reconstructs the stanza as follows: αἰ δὲ μή, ἀλλὰ σ’ ἔγω θέλω / ᾄμναισαι, [σὺ δὲ] δ[τῆ] φρ[ο]σαι, / ὄσ[σ’] ἴμερτα τε] καὶ κάλ[η] ἐπάσχομεν (“If not, then I want to remind you, and you consider all the lovely and beautiful things we experienced”).

⁵¹ In the middle of all this we read that “on soft beds, tender . . . you would satisfy your longing” (καὶ στρώμ[αν] ἐπὶ μολθάκαν / ἀπάλαν πα .[] . . . ὦν / ἐξίης πόθο[v] . νίδων, fr. 94.21–23). This passage has been widely interpreted as referring to sexual gratification, but it is just as likely that the girl took a nap: Lardinois 1996: 164 n. 70, with earlier references. Add to the evidence collected there that the young women’s chorus in Alcman fr. 3.6–8 says that it scatters sweet sleep from its eyes before going to the gathering place to participate in the dancing.

⁵² Rauk (1989: 110–14) compares Sappho’s insistence on remembering in this poem to Erinna’s remark in the *Distaff* that Baucis “in her marriage” “forgot everything” that she had learned from her mother (lines 28–30), and to Helen, who in Sappho fr. 16 “forgot” her dear ones when she ran off with Paris. He also notes the similarity with the language of laments.

⁵³ This reading was first proposed by Page (1955: 92) and is printed by Campbell ([1982] 1990: 120).

⁵⁴ Parker 1996b: 806. Alcaeus fr. 38A.7 also uses the word in this sense.

⁵⁵ E.g., κ[ᾰ]ρ[ι] τερ]ωι, which Kamerbeek (1956: 101) proposes, or κ[ᾰ]ρ[ι] χάρ]ωι, suggested by Bonanno (1973–74: 114); cf. Degani and Burzacchini 1977: 169 (I owe this reference to Albert Henrichs). Following Kamerbeek’s suggestion, the stanza would read: πόλλα

not constitute an actual lament for the dead, it contains elements of this speech genre. The woman's remembrance (ἐπιμνάσθεις', 16–17) of gentle Atthis, who is far away, is reminiscent of Sappho fragments 16 and 94 and of the language of laments. Alexander Turyn has compared the woman's "wandering to and fro" (ζαφοίταις', 15), perhaps along the seashore if the reading δι' ἄλλον in line 20 is correct, to that of other grieving figures in Greek literature,⁵⁶ and the nocturnal imagery surrounding the woman also carries connotations of death.

Most of the fragment is taken up by a description of the woman in Lydia, who is likened to the moon goddess.⁵⁷ This woman is said to remember Atthis, who is the likely addressee of the poem and a young woman.⁵⁸ The persistent use of the first-person plural for the speaker in the poem suggests that it was sung by a chorus, which was probably made up of Atthis' (former?) companions.⁵⁹ The Lydian woman may function as an example to them, just as Helen of Troy functions as paradigm for the speaker in fragment 16. Her desire is emblematic of the desire they themselves feel for Atthis, just as her mourning matches theirs. In lines 4–5, they repeat the claim of the Lydian woman that Atthis is like a goddess manifest, thus effectively adopting her voice. Thomas McEvilley saw in this comparison of Atthis to a goddess an allusion to the hymeneal convention of the *makarismos* (on which, see below), but he confuses *laudator* and *laudanda* when he concludes that "Atthis and the departed girl are seen for the moment as potential bride and groom."⁶⁰ The Lydian woman is in the same position as the chorus: she praises the (future) bride.

Since the woman in Lydia left Atthis (rather than the other way around), she can only try to remember her, just as the chorus in the second, much damaged part of the fragment seems to be engaged in recalling events of

δὲ ζαφοίταις', ἀγάνας ἐπι- / μνάσθεις' Ἀτθιδος ἡμέρω / λέπταν ποι φρένα καρτέρω
βόρηται ("Often wandering to and fro, remembering gentle Atthis, she is devoured in her tender heart by strong desire [for Atthis]," 15–17). (The genitive Ἀτθιδος is so placed that it can be taken both with ἐπιμνάσθεις' and with ἡμέρω.) An adjective like κάρτερος ("strong") would nicely balance the "tenderness" of the woman's heart, as Kamerbeek noted, and together with ἡμέρω it would surround λέπταν ποι φρένα ("her tender heart") and iconically suggest the very act of devouring. Cavallini (1994) also argues in favor of taking ἡμέρω with βόρηται.

⁵⁶ Turyn 1929: 59–60, quoted by McEvilley (1973: 276).

⁵⁷ Schubart's emendation σέλαννα in line 8 for the unmetrical μήνα of the papyrus is supported by Janko (1982b), who also defends Lobel's suggestion that Selanna represents the personal name of the goddess; cf. McEvilley 1973: 262, contra Page 1955: 90.

⁵⁸ Atthis is, just like Anactoria (above), listed by Ovid under the *puellae* of Sappho (test. 19), and her relationship with Sappho is compared to that of Socrates and his pupils (test. 20). On Atthis as the likely addressee of the poem, see Page 1955: 92; Campbell [1982] 1990: 123 n. 1; Burnett 1983: 302–3; Lasserre 1989: 144–45; and Aloni 1997: xvii.

⁵⁹ Lardinois 1996: 161–63.

⁶⁰ McEvilley 1973: 262.

the past, including one time when Aphrodite poured nectar from a golden (pitcher?).⁶¹ This event is very similar to the ritual described in Sappho fragment 2 (above), and it is not unlikely that the second half of this poem, like fragment 94, contained a series of events that the speaker remembered experiencing with Atthis in the past.⁶² Like Helen in fragment 16, the Lydian woman probably plays a dual role in the poem: besides functioning as an example to the speaker of the poem, she also functions as comparison for the addressee, Atthis. Like the Lydian woman, Atthis is compared to a goddess (4), and together the two of them are distinct from the chorus, which says that it cannot rival goddesses in loveliness of figure (21–22). If my interpretation of the poem as a wedding song is correct, Atthis is no longer a girl, but, like the Lydian woman, she “now stands out among women” (6–7). The poem thus celebrates the newly found status of Atthis, while at the same time mourning the loss of the friends of her youth.

I have taken a detailed look at fragments 16, 94, and 96 of Sappho. By comparing these fragments to lament speeches and the information we possess about performances of laments at Greek weddings, I have identified them as wedding songs, which were performed either by Sappho herself (fr. 94) or by female friends of the bride (frs. 16 and 96). It has been argued that the speech genre of lament allowed women, both in ancient and in modern Greece, to voice a degree of “social protest.”⁶³ They could express in laments their displeasure with their own lot as well as with the lot of their relatives who were taken away from them by war or disease. One may find traces of this function in these wedding songs as well. Although the “protest” here is highly stylized and was probably expected as part of the wedding ceremony, the language of lament embedded in these wedding songs provided the female performers with a vehicle for voicing, in public, something of their sense of loss and anxiety about the marriage. One may compare John Campbell’s observation of the sisters of the bride at a modern Greek wedding: “The unmarried sisters whom the bride leaves behind display a grief which in its public aspect is certainly conventionally expected, but for some days after the wedding they seem even in the privacy of the family hut to be stunned by the loss of their sister’s accustomed presence. Sisters sense the dread and apprehension which the bride herself feels when she leaves the protective circle of her family to be given into the care of strangers.”⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ἀφροδίτα κα[] νέκταρ ἔχευ’ ἀπὸ / χρυσαίας, fr. 96.26–28. Zuntz (1939: 107) suggests reading κάμμι κάλιδος or κάλιδος ἄμμι in the lacuna, which would translate: “and she poured for us nectar from a golden pitcher.” Some scholars believe that a new poem begins after line 20, but this is unlikely: see Saake 1971: 174; Carey 1978: 368; Burnett 1983: 311; and Lardinois 1996: 161–62.

⁶² Carey 1978: 368.

⁶³ Caraveli 1986; cf. Holst-Warhaft 1992; Foley 1993.

⁶⁴ Campbell 1964: 173, partially quoted by Jenkins (1983: 145 n. 50).

THE PRAISE OF BRIDES

Sappho was perhaps most famous in antiquity for her wedding songs. At least one book, probably the ninth, in the Alexandrian edition of her poetry consisted wholly of wedding songs, while other marriage songs were included among the other eight books, which were organized according to meter.⁶⁵ Young women again played a prominent role in the performance of such songs. Sappho herself describes the wedding procession for Hector and Andromache, in which “maidens (*parthenoi*) sang clearly a holy song,” and Pindar imagines a wedding feast, where one could hear “the sound of full-voiced wedding songs (*hymenaioi*), such as young women (*parthenoi*), who are companions (*hetairai*) and age-mates (*balikes*) of the bride, are wont to utter seductively in evening songs.”⁶⁶

As we have seen in the previous section, part of the function of Greek wedding songs was to lament and console the bride over the loss of her youth. Another function was to praise the groom. One greeted the groom with a traditional blessing (*makarismos*), in which he was compared to a god or famous hero.⁶⁷ Traces of this practice can be found in Sappho fragments 105b, 111, and perhaps 31 (see below). But the singers seem to have reserved most of their attention for the bride. She was described in highly erotic terms, as is clear from Sappho fragment 112: after the groom is hailed as being “blessed” (ὄλβιε), the speaker of this fragment turns to the bride and tells her: “Your form is graceful, your eyes . . . honey-sweet, and *erōs* streams over your desirable face. . . . Aphrodite has honored you outstandingly.”⁶⁸

When the speaker in this fragment says that *erōs* streams over the desirable face of the bride, it is by no means clear that this is supposed to have an effect on her husband only. There is some evidence to suggest that a bride was expected to be the object of widespread erotic admiration at ancient Greek weddings.⁶⁹ In fragment 16, which I discussed above, the chorus expresses its desire for Anactoria, when they recall her “lovely step” (ἔρατόν τε βᾶμα, 17) and adduce her as an example of the thing they love (ἔραται, 4). Similarly, the chorus in fragment 96 recalls the desire for Atthis (“Ἀτθιδος ἰμέρω, 16), by which the tender heart of a woman in Lydia is con-

⁶⁵ Page 1955: 125; Contiades-Tsitsoni 1990: 71.

⁶⁶ Sappho fr. 44.25–26; Pind. *Pyth.* 3.16–19. See also Figure 4 in this volume (p. 108). On ancient Greek wedding songs in general, see Mangelsdorff 1913; Maas 1914; Muth 1954; Hague 1983; Contiades-Tsitsoni 1990; and Lyghounis 1991.

⁶⁷ Hague 1983: 134–35; Lyghounis 1991: 185.

⁶⁸ σοὶ χάριεν μὲν εἶδος, ὄπαντα δ' . . . / μέλλιχ', ἔρος δ' ἐπ' ἰμέρται κέχυται προσώποι, fr. 112.3–4. The context in Choricus (*Oratio nuptialis in Zachariam* 19), who quotes part of the fragment, makes it clear that these words are addressed to the bride.

⁶⁹ Seaford 1994: 36 n. 25 cites the evidence.

sumed. I believe that these fragments demonstrate the erotic appeal that the bride was supposed to hold for the choruses who sing these songs as well as for the audience at large.

The strongest expression of desire for another woman occurs in Sappho fragment 31. This fragment describes a series of emotions that the speaker feels when she sees a woman laughing and talking to a man. Her heart misses a beat, her ears ring, she cannot speak, and sweat pours down her face. She enumerates ten of these afflictions in all before concluding that “all can be endured” (17). The speaker in the fragment is not identified, and most interpreters assume that she is Sappho, but she could just as well represent a chorus of young women.⁷⁰ Scholars at the beginning of the twentieth century believed that this poem represented a wedding song.⁷¹ The opening line, in which the man is compared to a god, recalls the traditional *makarismos* of the groom, and the position of the man and woman, sitting opposite one another, is paralleled by the depiction of other married couples in Greek literature and art.⁷² Most recent interpreters, starting with Denys Page, have rejected this view.⁷³ Page objects that it would be inappropriate for Sappho (or, presumably, any other speaker) to speak about the intensity of her passions for a bride on her wedding day, but we have seen that such declarations of desire were indeed not out of place in Greek wedding songs. Jane Snyder objects that “a wedding song must have chiefly to do with the bride and the groom, not with the speaker’s passion for one of them,” but as Glenn Most remarks: “It is in fact the beauty of the unnamed girl that is the burden of the poem and the justification for its composition and performance: every detail Sappho provides is designed to testify, not to the poet’s susceptibility, but to the girl’s seductiveness.”⁷⁴

The *partheneia* or “maiden songs” of Alcman provide a close parallel for the erotic praise of a young woman by a female chorus. The term *partheneion* is Hellenistic, and the two main fragments (frs. 1 and 3) appear to be reli-

⁷⁰ Lardinois 1996: esp. 167–69.

⁷¹ Welcker [1857] 1861: 89–90; Wilamowitz 1913: 58; and Snell [1931] 1966: 82. More recently: Schadewaldt 1950: 98; Merkelbach 1957: 6; Fränkel [1962] 1973: 176; Lasserre 1974: 22; and Rissman 1983: 103–4.

⁷² Snell [1931] 1966: 82–83; Rissman 1983: 90–93. See also McEvelley (1978: 6–8) and Latacz (1985: 86–87), who, on the basis of the diction, conclude that ἄνηρ, ὅστις ἐνάντιός τοι / ἰσθάνει must refer to a husband. McEvelley further cites as evidence a likely allusion to Sappho’s opening stanza in *Anth. Pal.* 5.94, and Seaford (1994: 36) adduces a vase (*ARV*² 1017.44) depicting a bride and groom who sit opposite one another. This vase is reproduced in Oakley and Sinos 1993: 83, figs. 60 and 61.

⁷³ Page 1955: 30–33; cf. Lanata [1966] 1996: 22; Saake 1971: 36–37; Kirkwood 1974: 121–22; Snyder 1989: 19–20 and 1991: 12–13.

⁷⁴ Snyder 1991: 13; Most 1982: 97.

gious hymns designed to be sung by choruses of young women.⁷⁵ In Alcman fragment 3, the chorus describes a young woman named Astymeloisa, who is probably their chorus leader, in highly erotic terms. They say that she causes “longing that loosens the limbs,” and that “she casts glances that are more melting than sleep or death; not in vain is she sweet.”⁷⁶ Maurice Bowra says about the girl: “We are left with the impression that the whole company is in love with her . . . ,” but later he adds: “The aim of the song is the celebration of a girl’s beauty and charm which everyone is intended to feel.”⁷⁷ The homoerotic feelings that the chorus expresses for Astymeloisa in this poem, and similar sentiments detectable in Alcman fragment 1, therefore appear to be intended as public praise rather than as personal declarations of love.⁷⁸ I would argue that the same holds true for the erotic appeal that Sappho and her choruses attribute to young brides.

Eva Stehle has explained the use of young women’s choruses to praise the sexual attractiveness of other women by pointing out that “Greek culture generally insisted on a construction of the socially acceptable female body as sexually passive. One consequence is that women could praise other women sexually without compromising men’s appropriation of those women.”⁷⁹ I would add that the relationship between homo- and heterosexuality was also viewed differently from modern times, and that the ancient Greeks commonly assumed that if a young person was erotically appealing to the one sex, he or she would also be attractive for the other.⁸⁰ Still, it is significant that women were called upon to praise other women at all, given how seldom they were allowed to express their views in public. It is also noteworthy that they were allowed to describe their female companions in such erotic terms. As Stehle further remarks: “Since women were called on to praise other women in public, the idea of desire between women was not repressed.”⁸¹

⁷⁵ See Calame 1977 on Alcman frs. 1 and 3 and the origin of the term *partheneion*. Griffiths (1972) has argued that Alcman fr. 1 actually constitutes a marriage song. This interpretation has to be rejected, but it is instructive that such a reading could even be considered, and some of the parallels Griffiths draws between Alcman’s *partheneia* and ancient Greek wedding songs are certainly valid.

⁷⁶ Alcman fr. 3.61–63: λυσιμελεῖ τε πόσῳ, τακερότερα / δ’ ὕπνω και σανάτω ποτιδέρκετα / οὐδέ τι μαμηδίως γλυκ[ῆ]α κ[ῆ]να.

⁷⁷ Bowra 1961: 177 and 213. The celebrated girl is said to be running among a large crowd in lines 73–74.

⁷⁸ It has been argued by Calame and others that these young women were involved in actual homoerotic relationships with each other, but the evidence is not very strong: see Lardinois 1998a: 122–24.

⁷⁹ Stehle 1997: 78.

⁸⁰ Dover 1978: 1, 65–67; Lardinois 1989: 24; Halperin 1990a: 33–35; and Calame [1992] 1999: 54–55.

⁸¹ Stehle 1997: 93.

SOMETHING OF THE VOICES OF YOUNG WOMEN

In the previous paragraphs, I have tried to use our fragmentary knowledge of ancient Greek female speech genres to explain some of the fragmentary remains of Sappho's songs. These songs in turn can tell us something about these speech genres and are important witnesses to them. We have seen how in the religious hymns of Sappho, young women were allowed to experience a close relationship with a powerful goddess such as Aphrodite. Through the myths they told they could further liken themselves, and their addressees, to famous mythological figures such as Helen of Troy, Eos, Selene, Leto, and Niobe. In laments incorporated into wedding songs, the young women could voice something of their bitterness in losing their family or friends, and in the same wedding songs as well as in some religious hymns, they could reveal something of their erotic passion for other women. It is true that none of these songs represent genuine outpourings of personal emotions. They are all scripted by poets such as Sappho or Alcman and must have been experienced as conventional by the audiences that first listened to them. Still, the young women presented these songs in their own voices and probably could relate some of the lyrics to their own experiences.

The very formality of the occasion on which the young women performed these songs signifies another restriction placed on their voices. Brides may have been allowed to lament the loss of their virginity on their wedding day, but they were not expected to repeat the performance every night in the bedroom. Similarly, women may have been able to identify themselves with powerful goddesses during religious rituals, as long as they were willing to assume a subservient role to their husbands and fathers once they returned home. These performances are part of rituals of controlled ambiguity, in which the rules of ordinary society are temporarily suspended in order to expose the underlying tensions on which it is founded.⁸² Yet, for the duration of the rituals, such tensions are recognized as real, and the original audiences could have heard in these songs, however faintly, through the ritual and authorial filters placed on them, something of the hopes and anxieties of young women. So can we.

⁸² For the concept of rituals of controlled ambiguity, see Oudemans and Lardinois 1987: esp. 56–57. This chapter was composed with the generous support of the University of Minnesota Faculty Summer Research Program and the McKnight Summer Fellowship Program (1998). An oral version was delivered at the University of Minnesota and the University of Wisconsin at Madison. I would like to thank the different audiences, my coeditor Laura McClure, and Michelle Lewis for their valuable suggestions and comments.