

## CRITICAL ESSAY

# Erica Jong's Sappho and the Classical Tradition\*

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"I do believe that in every age there are people whose consciousness transcends their own time and that these people, whether fictional or historical, are those with whom we most closely identify and those about whom we most enjoy reading. I have tried to write an interesting and entertaining novel, not an historical treatise, so the development of my heroine's character has always been more important to me than the setting in which we find her."

—Erica Jong, *Fanny: Being the True History of the  
Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones*

### I. Introduction

"So many stories about me. My legend confused with the legends of Aphrodite. Did I leap to my death for the love of a handsome young ferryman? Did I love women or men? Does love even have a sex?" So speaks Sappho in the arresting prologue of Erica Jong's novel *Sappho's Leap*, as Jong's heroine, standing on the edge of the Leucadian cliff, begins

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\* As the classicist who served as Erica Jong's consultant for *Sappho's Leap* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), I have read with interest the five academic reviews of this novel written by Joy Connolly (*New York Times Book Review* [May 18, 2003] 8), Emily Wilson (*London Review of Books* [January 8, 2004] 27–28), Meryl Altman (*Women's Review of Books* [January 2004] 8–10), Mary Beard (*Independent* [August 20, 2004] 17), and Harry Sidebottom (*Times Literary Supplement* [September 24, 2004] 20).

Although Connolly finds Jong's novel well-researched for Greek culture of Sappho's day, she calls her Sappho a typical Jongian/Harlequin heroine, who appears in scenes recalling *Clash of the Titans* or *Xena: Warrior Princess*. Regrettably Connolly regards Jong's novel as little more than a comic book, while implying that her Sappho is merely a reincarnation of Isadora Wing, the heroine of *Fear of Flying*—the sexual-revolution classic that skyrocketed Jong to celebrity status.

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to relate the story of her life. In this beautifully written and thoroughly researched work of historical fiction, Jong aims to rescue Sappho, the greatest female poet of the classical world, from questionable assumptions about her. Early Greek dramatists featured her in their ribald comedies (now lost); her Roman detractors characterized her as a prostitute, or a sexual/social deviant, or a victim of unrequited heterosexual love. The Roman poet Ovid epitomizes this tradition in *Heroides* 15, where he depicts Sappho as a desolate heroine, crying her eyes out for the ferryman Phaon and preparing to take the Leucadian leap. Jong's Sappho quickly dispels the notion that she feels desolate over being abandoned by some younger lover: "What rot! I toyed with him more than he toyed with me. He was the plaything of the week." Sappho has appeared in other modern novels—Peter Green's *The Laughter of Aphrodite* (1965), Martha Rofheart's *Burning Sappho* (1975), and Peggy Ullman Bell's *Psappha: A Novel of Sappho* (2000). Jong, however, gives Sappho new stature, by transforming her into a female Odysseus on a voyage of self-discovery, who admires and follows in the footsteps of her celebrated Homeric predecessor. In addition, Jong enriches the narrative with her own elegant adaptations of Sappho's fragments from the original Greek and with her own Sappho-inspired creations written in the style of Sappho. Furthermore, Jong's Sappho comments on a variety of political and social issues on which the historical Sappho, veiled in mystery, could have reflected while looking at the plight of women in her day.

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Reviewing three books on Sappho, Wilson devotes only two sentences to Jong's novel, in which, while giving away the ending, she misuses Jong's (in)famous expression "zipless fuck," by applying it to Sappho's experience with Phaon. This experience does not meet the criteria for the ultimate A-1 zipless experience defined in *Fear of Flying* (chapter 1)—the pure, brief, anonymous, dreamlike, passionate sexual encounter, free of ulterior motives and free of all guilt and remorse.

Reviewing the same three books as Wilson, Altman praises Jong for calling attention in her novel about Sappho to a number of unresolved 'second-wave' issues, e.g., how to reconcile erotic, ambitious, and maternal longings. Nevertheless, Altman falls into the same tenacious trap as Wilson, when, as though to sanitize the goddess of love, she asks her readers the following question: "Would Aphrodite wish her ode to spend eternity immortalized beside the 'zipless fuck'?"

Although Beard calls Jong's novel an enjoyable and craftily drawn read, she also (like Connolly) reduces it to a combination of typical Jongian themes—casual energetic sex, mothers and daughters, and more casual energetic sex. In addition, Beard expresses her surprise that Jong had not made a raunchy Sappho the central character of one of her earlier novels, especially since thirty years have elapsed since the publication of *Fear of Flying* and its trademark "zipless fuck."

By calling Jong's novel a work of "chick lit," filled with what he regards as infelicities of style, Sidebottom not only demeans Jong's careful research on archaic Greece but completely ignores the novel's literary qualities and virtues. In this regard Sidebottom fails to consider how Sappho matures as a character, from a naive young girl to a worldly middle-aged woman, in a narrative enriched by parallels to Homer's epic poetry and adaptations of Sappho's lyric verses.

The four female reviewers have evaluated *Sappho's Leap* in the context of *Fear of Flying*—the source of the zipless expression, which Jong's Sappho never utters, and the zipless experience, which Jong's Sappho never experiences. Furthermore, all five reviewers have overlooked the skillful artistry contained in Jong's novel, involving the use of classical models and themes—something I hope that this essay will rectify for those readers who wish to look beneath the surface.

## II. Sappho's Odyssey

Just as Homer introduces Odysseus at the nadir of his career, lamenting his confinement on Calypso's island (*Od.* 5), so Jong introduces Sappho at the nadir of her career, about to jump off the Leucadian cliff into the wine-dark sea. As she imagines the icy waters of Acheron lapping at her toes, Jong's Sappho says: "But Penelope lived to see her Odysseus once more. Will I ever see my love again?"—referring to the poet Alcaeus. She remembers her mother and father, Cleis and Scamandronymus, her brothers Charaxus, Larichus, and Eurygius, who (as children) thrashed each other with wooden swords like Homer's heroes. She recalls how she fell in love with Alcaeus and pictures herself performing with him at the symposium of the dictator Pittacus, who proceeds to hunt down Alcaeus for his slander and treachery. As Pittacus's satyr-masked men pursue the young lovers by sea, Alcaeus hears Sappho praying to Aphrodite for help and screams: "Try Athena. She's a warrior! She's the one who rescued Odysseus!" Sappho suddenly jumps overboard at Alcaeus's command and swims to shore without him, where she builds a hut and learns to catch fish with her bare hands, until she is rescued by her grandfather. To crush her rebellious nature and to save her from death at the hands of Pittacus, her family imposes a sentence worse than death—marriage to the ancient, drunken, paunchy merchant Cercylas! Having moved from Lesbos to Syracuse—part of an arrangement with Pittacus—Cercylas prospers in his business while Sappho, likening herself to a wandering Odysseus, continues to sing her songs. Invited by Jezebel of Motya, a priestess of Baal, to a ritual involving the sacrifice of a firstborn child, she becomes horrified by it, especially when she feels Alcaeus's baby in her womb kick for the first time. When Sappho gives birth to Cleis, whom Cercylas believes that he has fathered, she regards her labor pains as far more severe than anything that Odysseus could have felt when he visited Hades' realm. Playing Penelope during Cleis's infancy, she reunites but quarrels with her mother, who (widowed) had married Pittacus to protect her family and had helped arrange Sappho's own marriage to Cercylas. To ensure the fate of baby Cleis, Sappho and her mother visit the priestess of Isis, who predicts bright futures for Sappho and her daughter and with whom Sappho falls in love and has a passionate affair. When Sappho learns that Cercylas has died from excessive drinking, she and Isis celebrate; but when Sappho's mother learns about Sappho's affairs with Alcaeus and Isis, she kidnaps her grandchild.

Just as Homer's Odysseus travels extensively to find his Ithaca (*Od.* 9–12), so Jong's Sappho travels extensively for news about Alcaeus and her daughter—where the Ithacan and the Lesbian do all they can to protect their companions. Against an Iliadic (and intentionally humorous) backdrop of Zeus and Aphrodite debating her fate, Sappho sails to Delphi, where the Pythia informs her about the fate of her daughter and her brothers. She arrives at Delphi only after dreaming that she was Odysseus pummeled by Poseidon and only after receiving help from Leucothoe, who saves her, as she had saved Odysseus with her magic veil (*Od.* 5). Then she sails to Egypt, to the city Naucratis, to rescue Charaxus and Larichus, who had traveled there with Cercylas to trade the wine of Lesbos only to become enslaved by the wily courtesan Rhodopis. There she meets Aesop the fabulist, who becomes her ally, and Pharaoh Necho, who makes Sappho his lover and whom she persuades to free her brothers after half a year to repair their family fortune. She visits the Land of the Amazons, where Queen Antiope orders her to write *The Amazoniad*, an epic poem bowdlerized by 'first-wave' Amazon loyalists, sparking a strong 'second-wave' Amazon revolt. Although Sappho initially begs off—"I am no Homer, Majesty"—

she finally agrees, but agonizes knowing that her censors will not let her sing about “an Amazon Odysseus,” i.e., anybody less than perfect. Like Odysseus (*Od.* 11), Sappho visits the Land of the Dead, where Charon—new to the scene—tells her that what blind Homer thought was blood for the ghosts was only frigid water, sticky with souls. There she sees her dear father, who (like Homer’s Tiresias) advises her about her future, and spirits of her past, such as her little brother Eurygius and ancient, paunchy Cercylas, holding a cup of wine. Sappho sails to the Island of the Philosophers, where she sees three old men who debate about water, air, and fire, who correspond to the historical Ionian monists Thales, Anaximenes, and Heraclitus. Sappho and Aesop soon learn that the three old philosophers were projections of the snake-woman Herpetia (sister of Circe [*Od.* 10]), who (like Polyphemus [*Od.* 9]) curses her visitors as they escape by sea. Finally Sappho sails to the Island of the Centaurs, where Chiron explains that Zeus had banished him and his misunderstood brethren out of jealousy for their superior wisdom and civilized behavior. Sappho suggests uniting the Centaurs and Amazons at a marvelous moment, when she sees how the Centaurs gently revive two storm-tossed Amazons with an arc of fire from their enormous phalli.

Just as Homer pictures Odysseus returning to Ithaca after visiting dreamy, dangerous realms (*Od.* 13–24), so Jong pictures Sappho returning to Lesbos after boldly facing a number of arduous challenges in the worlds of myth and reality. After a joyous reunion with Alcaeus—shattered because of a sexual encounter with her ally Aesop at a vulnerable moment—Sappho decides to return to Lesbos to reunite with the members of her family. Like Odysseus, she does not reveal her identity upon her arrival, but after assessing the situation, she sheds her disguise quickly to embrace her dying mother Cleis and behold her young daughter Cleis. Having learned that Pittacus had pardoned her and Alcaeus months earlier, Sappho stays in Lesbos, where her surviving brother Charaxus lives with his wife Rhodopis, courtesan turned harridan. Having helped prepare her mother’s body for her funeral, Sappho participates in a lavish ceremony in the Greek tradition, after which Rhodopis demands the lion’s share of the deceased woman’s jewelry. Although Pittacus wants Sappho to sing again—i.e., patriotic songs, songs of war and battle, etc.—Sappho reinvents herself as a singer of love and assumes the role of mentoring beautiful young women. Sappho instructs these women in poetry and pleasure until Rhodopis spreads rumors accusing her of debauchery and her student Timas commits suicide to avoid marrying a rich old friend of her father. In the midst of her troubles, Sappho meets the handsome young ferryman Phaon, who romances her, worms his way into her life, and inflames her with the drug of youth: “Oh, how he warmed my bed!” When she discovers that he has betrayed her by seducing several of her students, she gives him special instructions, which will banish him from her sight forever but bring great happiness to her daughter. Sappho then bids farewell to Cleis and her darling grandson Hector, but not her bumbling son-in-law Elpenor, named for the comrade of Odysseus who fell off the roof of Circe’s house in Homer, *Od.* 10. By instructing Phaon to seduce and then impregnate Cleis, who kept losing pregnancies with Elpenor, Sappho buries Elpenor in her mind, in contrast to how Odysseus had buried him physically in *Od.* 12. Standing on the Leucadian cliff and looking back at a litany of disappointments, Sappho thinks of the great singers preceding her, especially Homer, whom the gods did not spare, except for his words. Unaware that Alcaeus is sailing below, Sappho prepares for her destiny—a leap that will cure her of unrequited love one way or another and plunge her into the final chapter of her astonishing odyssey.

### III. Sappho's Poetry\*

As Jong incisively states in the Author's Afterword, different translators tend to create different Sapphos, and translations of Sappho have always reflected the age in which they were created as well as the personalities of the translators. One can still recall a time when writers, who had studied Greek and Latin as part of their formal education, translated classical verse into English in the meters used by the Greek and Roman poets. See, for example, John Addington Symonds' translation of Sappho's ode to Aphrodite or Algernon Charles Swinburne's original poem "Sapphics"—"All the night sleep came not upon my eyelids." Realizing that her Sappho, alternating between prose and poetry, needed a single voice, Jong offers "not literal translations but adaptations of Sappho's verses in a style appropriate to the flow of the novel." Using a technique that one also finds in Ted Hughes' *Tales from Ovid* (1997), she aims "to capture the essence of Sappho's ideas, in a way that approximates (as much as possible) the original Greek." Early in the novel, during the symposium hosted by Pittacus, Sappho sings her hymn to Aphrodite (fr. 1), her only poem that has survived in its entirety, as quoted by Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Jong's adaptation of this famous poem appears below—one of two extant poems of Sappho having a form (ἑθέλωισα, a feminine form of the participle) that testifies to her love for another woman:

Immortal Aphrodite—  
 Rainbow-throned  
 In the shimmering air—  
 Weaver of webs,  
     I pray  
 Do not shackle my heart  
     With sorrow.  
     Fly to me  
 From your father's house  
 In a whirling of sparrows' wings,  
     Your chariot descending  
     Over the dark earth  
     As you smile  
     Your sly, immortal smile  
     Asking whom I desire  
     So desperately this time,  
 Asking whom to persuade to love me,  
     Promising to turn  
     Indifference to passion  
     To make her pursue  
 When she longs to flee . . .

\* The four poetry passages cited in this section have been reprinted from *Sappho's Leap* by Erica Jong © 2003 by Erica Jong, with the permission of the publisher, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

\*\* For Symonds' translation, see J. A. Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets*, 2 vols. (London: Smith, Elder, 1877 [2nd edition]), vol. 1, p. 439, and (London: A. and C. Black, 1893 [3rd edition]), vol. 2, p. 416; for Swinburne's original poem, see E. Gosse and T. J. Wise (edd.), *The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, 20 vols. (London: W. Heinemann and New York: G. Wells, 1925–1927), vol. 1, pp. 333–335.

Oh Aphrodite, give what only you can give,  
Be my ally, my co-conspirator!

Jong incorporates in her novel many of Sappho's poems, which appear in a variety of serious and even ironic contexts, demonstrating her remarkable ability to highlight some of the best known and some of the less recognizable fragments. In this regard Jong depicts her young Sappho as a prodigy—like Mozart, or more recently Jay Greenberg, the genius studying at Juilliard, who at the age of twelve has already composed five symphonies. By seeing Jong's Sappho as a naive but brilliant young girl, the reader is able to visualize the fictitious Sappho as the author of the historical Sappho's poetry from the time of her first performance. Another famous poem (fr. 31), quoted by Longinus, is the second of two extant poems of Sappho having a form (*χλωροτέρα*, a feminine form of the adjective) that testifies to her love for another woman. In contrast to the Roman poet Catullus, who converts this poem into a lyric written by a man (*Carm.* 51), Jong retains the intent of the original by picturing Sappho herself as enamored of another woman:

The man who sits opposite you  
Seems fortunate as the gods  
Listening to your sweet voice,  
Your lovely laughter  
Which sets my heart trembling  
In my breast.  
When I so much as glance at you —  
My tongue goes numb.  
I cannot speak.  
A subtle fire  
Steals beneath my flesh.  
My eyes are blind.  
My ears hum.  
Sweat pours from me.  
Trembling seizes me all over.  
I am greener than grass,  
And I seem to be  
A little short of dying.  
But I endure it all  
For love of you.

Jong cleverly exploits information found in the classical testimonies, as with the song that Sappho supposedly composed about how the courtesan Rhodopis duped her brother Charaxus (Herodotus 2.135). As Sappho says: "Years later, fragments of this song were found by my followers and used to prove slanderous things about my brother and me. It is not enough to rip up your rejected drafts. Burn them!" Jong incorporates famous verses by Sappho (fr. 137) and Alcaeus (fr. 384) in the first love-letter written by Alcaeus to Sappho on Egyptian papyrus months after Pittacus had banished him to Lydia. When Alcaeus describes his activities in Lydia, he also declares: "And yet I think always of Sappho—violet-haired, holy, honey-smiling Sappho. I wish to say something to you, but shame prevents me." (Here too Jong reveals her knowledge of ancient writing materials:

"I had learned to make letters on clumsy wax-covered wooden tablets when I was a child. Then, when I was older, I was allowed animal skins to write on. They always betrayed the bloody odor of their origins. Papyrus was so much purer. I loved the feel of chaste papyrus sheets on which you could spill your heart's fresh blood!") Alcaeus's second love-letter refers to "violet-haired Sappho—or Psappho, as you call yourself in our beautiful Aeolic dialect"—a variant of Sappho's name used only by Sappho in the original Greek. This letter contains one of Jong's loveliest Sappho-inspired creations, on the *kallisteia*, the beauty contests of Lesbos, "where the young girls swayed like mobile caryatids in their columns of white linen":

Lesbian maidens in trailing robes  
Walk up and down, being judged for their beauty.  
Around them, women choir to Aphrodite. . . .  
O Lesbos, you sprout beautiful women  
Even as you grow the vine and the olive tree.  
Soft syllables shake the silvery olive leaves  
As the wind whispers  
Sappho, Sappho, Sappho. . . .

One observes Jong's ability to write superb original poetry in "Talking to Aphrodite," a sequence of nine poems (in honor of the nine lost books of Sappho) at the end of the novel, written in Sappho's voice, in Aphrodite's, and in Jong's own. As Jong makes clear in the Author's Afterword, this sequence of poems preceded the novel, while the novel went underground for several years, perhaps growing what Nabokov called "wings and claws." This remarkable collection, containing some of the most beautiful poems that Jong has ever written, takes the reader on a second odyssey—not Sappho's, but Jong's own, as a priestess of a mighty goddess. Here one finds such memorable pieces as "The Priestess Attempts to Retire," the most autobiographical in the collection: "Aphrodite, I have toiled/in your service forty years/& I am still alive to tell it." In "Aphrodite Explains," the goddess recalls her encounter with the young ferryman Phaon and interprets Sappho's experience with him in a manner that differs from its presentation in the novel. In "Aphrodite's Laughter," as Jong asks Aphrodite to let earthlings catch their breath, the goddess says: "The planets are my playthings"—pointing to the fates of Sappho, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton. In "Sappho: A Footnote," Jong describes Sappho as a poet who "tried to hold the sky in her two arms/& failed—" and looks at the fate of her verses in one of the most unforgettable passages in the collection:

Most of her words  
vanished. Millennia  
flew by.  
The goddess she worshiped,  
born of the sea's pale foam,  
grew younger  
& more beautiful  
as the words of the poet  
dissolved.  
All this was foretold.

Sappho burned  
 & Christians burned  
 her words.  
 In the Egyptian desert,  
 bits of papyri  
 held notations  
 of her flaming heart.  
 Aphrodite smiles,  
 remembering Sappho's words:  
 "If death were good,  
 Even the gods would die."

#### *IV. Sappho's Insights*

As Jong's Sappho—a bisexual, in keeping with the double tradition found in Sappho's verses and other classical sources—passes from youth to middle age, she matures and acquires much knowledge, especially about love and marriage. The naive young Sappho falls madly in love with Alcaeus from the moment that they meet and suffers the tortures of the damned when Pittacus hunts him down and banishes him from his homeland. When Sappho's family forces her to marry Cercylas, she begs the maidens to keep singing her bridal song—"Raise high the roof beams!"—to keep the old sot drinking until he collapses in a drunken swoon. After her affair with the priestess of Isis, Sappho and her slave-girl Praxinoa witness an astonishing debate in which two goddesses and a half-goddess ask each other what women should live for. Helen argues for love, Athena argues for intellect, and Demeter argues for motherhood—to which a cynical Sappho replies: "Look where love took you and the world!"—but without answering their question. After her affair with Pharaoh Necho and her odyssey through mythical realms, Sappho reunites with Alcaeus, unexpectedly and passionately, only to see their relationship ripped apart all over again. Wanting Alcaeus to love her daughter without proof of paternity, she becomes disappointed in his lack of understanding and succumbs to a momentary but unforgivable sexual indiscretion with Aesop. After reuniting with her dying mother and taking part in her funeral ceremony, Sappho resumes her career as a singer of love and proceeds to instruct attractive female students in poetry and pleasure. When unhappy Timas commits suicide to avoid marrying a rich old friend of her father, Sappho utters an incisive paradox: "We teach maidens to sing and then we give them husbands to silence them." Betrayed by some of her students, Sappho plunges into an affair with handsome young Phaon, "the pretty boy who adores you to mend your heart when you have been undone by the treachery of women." Ultimately betrayed by Phaon himself, who seduces several of her faithful students, Sappho exacts payment from the agate-eyed youth in a way that allows her daughter to have a daughter of her own. Jong's Sappho, a tower of strength, does not leap off the Leucadian cliff for a weasel like Phaon; a far more likely scenario—Phaon himself taking the leap for a woman as extraordinary as Sappho. In fact, by the end of the novel, when one realizes all that Sappho has acquired after her odyssey of self-discovery, he/she has the answer to the question raised above about love, intellect, and motherhood.

Beyond her fascination with love, sexuality, and sensuality—indeed major themes in the world of Jong's Sappho—the heroine of this novel provides quotable commentary about such interrelated subjects as power, freedom, and slavery. Sappho recalls how, after

Alcaeus slandered Pittacus during his performance at the symposium, the tyrant proceeded to joke with his detractor as though he did not really care about being criticized. Seeing Pittacus as a consummate politician, who knew how to lie to people with a straight face, Sappho makes the following astute observation: "Ridicule enrages tyrants even if they pretend to be above it." As a young mother living in Lesbos, Sappho chastises her own mother (a widow) for becoming the companion of Pittacus and for arranging for her (Sappho) to marry the ancient, drunken Cercylas. Not until Sappho herself becomes involved in a relationship imposed upon her by Pharaoh Necho does she understand what a woman of her day must do in order to survive in a world controlled by autocrats. During the debate in which Helen, Athena, and Demeter talk about love, intellect, and motherhood, Sappho's slave-girl Praxinoa laughs at the immortals for not seeing liberty at the root of their choices. When the debaters seem perplexed about Praxinoa's opinion, she boldly declares: "Liberty is at the root of all we want, for only free women can participate in this debate. Choice is the luxury of the free." Just as Pittacus bids Sappho to sing songs that glorify the state, so the repressive Queen Antiope bids Sappho to write *The Amazoniad*, in which she must depict the Amazons as perfect in every way. Later, referring to women as living "as an occupied nation in the world of men," Sappho concludes, based on her overall experience with the Amazons, that she does not hold out hope for either gender. One finds a self-imposed servitude on the Island of the Philosophers, where the three old men who debate about water, air, and fire retain their power through the blind ignorance of their young slaves. As the frightened youth Creon makes clear to Sappho: "We would be lost without them. As long as they sit and debate the nature of the universe, we are safe. Should they stop, chaos will come again." Returning to Lesbos in her maturity, Sappho learns that Pittacus has pardoned her and Alcaeus but still comments: "People talk of loving peace, but war cements the powers of tyrants and the military." As she and her grandson Hector recite a song written by Alcaeus, she can hardly bring herself to believe that this darling little boy will grow up to become a tyrant, defend the polis, and subjugate women.

During the course of her travels, Jong's Sappho frequently encounters the imperfect side of the human spirit, aspects of it that have plagued humanity from time immemorial, such as vanity, avarice, zealotry, duplicity, and insincerity. When Cyrus, the gewgaw-jingling Lydian, urges Sappho to sing for gold in order to pay off her debts, she succumbs to his arguments even though she knows that Aphrodite will become angry with her. As Aphrodite appears to her less and less, she continues to perform in this manner until, on the way to Delphi, she endures a shipwreck and watches the crew, the Lydian, and his gold all swept overboard. Just as Cyrus exemplifies greed, so the courtesan Rhodopis exemplifies vanity—the golden-haired gold-digger who regards her beauty as invincible and enslaves men like Sappho's two gullible brothers. On another voyage to Delphi, Sappho and Aesop discover Rhodopis in the belly of Pharaoh Necho's ship—a seductress of the ship's slaves and officers, rising like Circe among these sleepy, inebriated beasts. In Crete Sappho's slave-girl Praxinoa becomes so dazzled by Amazon lore that she asks Sappho to free her so that she can become an Amazon, sacrifice a breast, and experience "the only truth there is." Looking at her in disbelief, Sappho wisely sizes up the situation: "I always cringe at the phrase 'the only truth.' I know I am in the presence of zealotry . . . . It is never profitable to argue with a new convert." Just before her unexpected reunion with Alcaeus, Sappho suddenly reveals her own vanity, as she worries that she does not look pretty enough for him, without any paint, perfumes, or elegant clothes. After the two lovers reunite passionately, Sappho still sees herself and Alcaeus as two of a kind—vain, sensual, always holding something back, continuously needing to be admired for

their cleverness. After the funeral ceremony of Sappho's mother, Rhodopis, now the hard-ridan housewife of Charaxus, falls on the ground and pounds her fists, demanding the lion's share of the deceased's jewelry. A little later, when she accuses Sappho of ruining her reputation by naming her in her songs, Sappho coins a moral for an imagined fable of Aesop: "There is no more perfect prude than a reformed whore." As for handsome young Phaon, the embodiment of duplicity and insincerity, who pledges his eternal love to Sappho, his true nature appears when he impregnates some of Sappho's young female students. As soon as Sappho becomes acquainted with the activities of this poacher in her henhouse, she gives him a swift slap on the cheek, causing him to cry great round tears as an admission of his treachery.

### V. Conclusion

Jong's Sappho, a true daughter of Odysseus, travels extensively on a personal mission, does everything to protect her companions, and returns to her homeland to resolve domestic matters. Jong's adaptations of Sappho's fragments, appearing independent of the prose but occasionally incorporated in the prose, enhance the narrative in a way that enables Sappho to speak in one eloquent voice. Although one cannot understand the classical world completely, because of its remoteness and fragmentary remains, Jong exercises the prerogative of the novelist to reinvent a special part of it. Although one cannot know the historical Sappho or resurrect her living voice from dead letters on a papyrus roll, Jong re-creates her as a spokeswoman, whose consciousness transcends her own time. Educational and entertaining, heartwarming and heartbreaking, *Sappho's Leap* introduces us to archaic Greece, to its people and its customs, and even to the splendor of its islands and its seas. Integrating prose with poetry and history with mythology as superbly as she does, Jong offers a novel exemplifying the classical tradition at its best, as a tribute to the poet whom Plato called the "tenth Muse." Jong does not model her Sappho on Isadora Wing or any other Jongian heroine, but re-creates her from clues found in reliable classical testimonies and ideas expressed in her immortal fragments. Yet Isadora Wing, the heroine of Jong's *Fear of Flying*, which not long ago celebrated its thirtieth anniversary, brought Jong the fame and notoriety that have figured in reviews of her novels to this day. In this regard Jong may continue to share with Sappho the mixed (i.e., friendly and sometimes hostile) reception that Sappho endured in classical antiquity and throughout the past twenty-six centuries. But then again, as Aphrodite could well say to Zeus in Sappho's defense during their ongoing debate about Sappho's fate: "Brilliant, influential women sometimes attract more hostility than acclaim."

### Appendix

This appendix lists the locations of all Jong's adaptations of the fragments of Sappho and Alcaeus by the pages on which they appear in the novel; all are keyed to the numeration of the fragments in E. Lobel and D. Page (edd.), *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), the standard scholarly edition of the fragments, and D. Campbell (ed.), *Greek Lyric*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 1982), the edition of the fragments most accessible to the general reader.

The reader should keep in mind that Jong does not provide literal translations of the fragments but adaptations of them, written in a style appropriate to the flow of the novel, and that she occasionally transforms a fragment of Sappho into a creation inspired by Sappho (e.g., Jong, p. 271 ~ Sappho, fr. 2, where, after Jong's Sappho prays to Aphrodite to come to her holy shrine, she describes Aphrodite in erotic terms while asking the goddess to help her and all those she loves—something not found in the original Greek).

<b>Jong:</b>	<b>L&amp;P/Loeb:</b>
p. xv	fr. 147 (Sappho)
p. xvii	fr. 58 (Sappho)
p. 1	fr. 20 (Sappho)
p. 2 (see also p. 250)	frs. 140a & 168 (Sappho)
p. 10	fr. 347a (Alcaeus)
pp. 12–13	frs. 346 & 348 (Alcaeus)
p. 13	fr. 118 (Sappho)
pp. 14–15	fr. 1 (Sappho)
p. 17	fr. 81 (Sappho)
p. 18 (see also pp. 29 & 36)	fr. 111 (Sappho)
p. 25	fr. 249 (Alcaeus)
p. 29 (see also pp. 18 & 36)	fr. 111 (Sappho)
p. 31	fr. 107 (Sappho)
p. 32	fr. 137 (Sappho) & fr. 384 (Alcaeus)
p. 33 (see also p. 244)	fr. 31.14–16 (Sappho)
p. 34	fr. 204 (Sappho)
p. 36 (see also pp. 18 & 29)	fr. 111 (Sappho)
p. 43	fr. 104a (Sappho)
p. 51 (see also p. 225)	fr. 132 (Sappho)
p. 56	fr. 25 (Sappho or Alcaeus)
p. 60	fr. 130 (Sappho)
p. 64	fr. 47 (Sappho)
p. 65 (see also p. 116)	fr. 48 (Sappho)
p. 67	fr. 148 (Sappho)
p. 78 (see also p. 84)	fr. 52 (Sappho)
pp. 82–83 (see also p. 258)	fr. 16 (Sappho)
p. 83	fr. 168B (Sappho?)*
p. 84 (see also p. 78)	fr. 52 (Sappho)
p. 99	fr. 15.10–12 (Sappho)
p. 116 (see also p. 65)	fr. 48 (Sappho)
p. 221	fr. 51 (Sappho)
p. 222	fr. 156 (Sappho)
p. 225 (see also p. 51)	fr. 132 (Sappho)
p. 235 (par. 1)	fr. 82a (Sappho)
p. 235 (par. 2, first quotation)	fr. 22.11–13 (Sappho)
p. 235 (par. 2, second quotation)	fr. 126 (Sappho)

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\* Printed in Loeb but not in Lobel and Page. This fragment, quoted by Hephaestion Metricus and attributed to Sappho by the scholar Arsenius (ca. 1500 A.D.), may not have been written by Sappho.

p. 237	epig. 158D (Sappho?)**
p. 239	fr. 95.10–13 (Sappho)
p. 243	fr. 57 & 131 (Sappho)
p. 244 (see also p. 33)	fr. 31 (Sappho)
p. 250 (see also p. 2)	fr. 140a & 168 (Sappho)
p. 251	fr. 88.14–16 (Sappho)
p. 258 (see also pp. 82–83)	fr. 16.1–4 (Sappho)
pp. 259–60	fr. 6 (Alcaeus)
p. 265 (par. 8, Olympus quotation)	fr. 27.12–13 (Sappho)
p. 269	fr. 5a (Sappho or Alcaeus)
p. 271 (see also p. 272)	fr. 2 (Sappho)
p. 272 (see also p. 271)	fr. 2 (Sappho)
p. 278	fr. 120 (Sappho)
p. 285	fr. 201 (Sappho)

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\*\* Printed in Loeb but not in Lobel and Page. This epigram, attributed to Sappho in the *Palatine Anthology* (7.489), may not have been written by Sappho and may belong to the Hellenistic period.