

January 20, 2004

Remembering the Body: Helen and Sappho

Gorgias "On Nature;" "Encomium of Helen"

Sappho, "Fragment 16"

Nancy Worman, "The Body as Argument"

Susan Jarratt, "Sappho's Memory"

Michelle Ballif, "Seduction and Sacrificial Gestures"

Shildrick and Price, "Openings on the Body"

Elizabeth V. Spelman, "Women as Body"

Sophists and Pre-Socratic Greece—

Eric Havelock: Pre-literate Greece and the culture of orality: "when speech is the sole medium of communication, both verbal style and thought processes are characterized by parataxis, the simple juxtaposition of ideas; by concrete imagery that appeals to the senses and to the emotions; by ritualized references to authority in the form of proverbs, epithets, incantations, and other formulas; and by a competitive, emotion-laden posture in disputation" (Bizzell and Herzberg 20).

In the 5th century, the rise of rhetoric came largely from the emerging polis and city-states; shift from oligarchy to Athenian democracy.

Empedocles (433 BCE)—"was interested in the power of language, and *rhetoric* might be understood in its earliest manifestation as designating the self-conscious study of the power of language, as opposed to the self-forgetful submission to its power induced by poetry" (Bizzell and Herzberg 21).—different idea of persuasion at work here

Corax and Tisias—first practitioners of a schematized rhetoric in Greek colony of Syracuse in Sicily (after 467 BCE)

Tisias and Gorgias are thought to have been pupils of Empedocles.

Sophists were essentially professional teachers and rhetoricians for hire

Sophists—see all knowledge as only accessible through discourse; rhetoric is an intellectual method, a way of generating knowledge; believed that only provisional or probable knowledge was available to human beings; saw human nature not as uniform, but as shaped by social circumstances (Bizzell and Herzberg 22).

Sophists—"Human knowledge is limited by the limits on human nature, whether circumstantial or perceptual [...] humanity could express itself in many ways, not subject to ranking by an absolute standard that could mark some human expressions or customs for annihilation" (Bizzell and Herzberg 23).

Sophists believe that our experience of the world is limited to what our senses can convey; attempting to communicate these experiences in language imposes a further limitation (Bizzell and Herzberg 24).

Sophists believe that dissensus is valuable in and of itself; there are no absolutes; everything is grounded in cultural and circumstantial specificity.

Plato sees Sophists as manipulators of discourse who lack a moral compass, who are willing to make the weaker argument the stronger for money or for fortune; he also sees them as lacking virtue.

Sophists think rhetoric is teachable; Plato believes rhetoric cannot be taught; need moral guidance to make it teachable.

Helen hated by Greeks and blamed; why Gorgias is so radical.

Logos—Implication of language with rationality and divine order

In the beginning was the word (logos). The word was made flesh. Logos→flesh; Helen=flesh or body.

Woman as category

Sappho—

Rhetoric as public discourse; therefore, women have often been excluded.

Most of Sappho's love lyrics are addressed to persons of the female gender and the speaking subject is indeed a lover of women.

Sappho came to writing within the feminized oikos and outside of the patriarchal and militaristic culture of Homer and Alcaeus.

Women were usually only meant for Greek marriage, for *ekdosis* (means "loan"); Lesbos still had provisions for unmarried women to be educated; young women were educated by way of an all-female fellowship, *thiasos*.

The speaking subject of Sappho's poems was a woman; her concern was how the "woman's voice" could best be heard and understood by an audience.

Her articulation of womanly concerns, of sensual desire, and of her own experience reflect a woman's sense of cyclical and linear time.

Sappho's female subjects are mostly defined by and limited to their physical being and states of emotion; they are not immortalized, as were the subjects of male poetry, for glory achieved by doing.

Helen is the active, choice making subject in Sappho's fragment.

Questions

Persuasion through poetry vs persuasion through rhetoric

How does Helen function in each of these texts?

What understanding of rhetoric emerges from these texts?

What's the relationship between desire and rhetoric?

Gorgias' work attempts to define being or knowledge as something not entirely knowable or accessible. Plato (Socrates) believes that there is a knowable truth. In light of these two views, what do we make of Gorgias' *Encomium*? Why defend Helen? And how is Sappho's depiction of Helen different?

Space and memory—why do we remember Helen? What does she mean for us?

What are the implications of logos=body or Helen?