Transgressing Translations: Interpreting Ancient Lesbian Texts as Anglican Hymns

Rioghnach Sachs
Kings College London

In 1919, Ezra Pound published 'Homage to Sextus Propertius,' a poem that interacts closely with books 2 and 3 of Propertius' *Elegies*. Although Pound did not view his own work as a translation of the ancient Latin text, but rather as the title indicated, a homage to Propertius, his work was criticised by a Latin professor at the University of Chicago, W. G. Hale, for its linguistic inaccuracies (Comber 52). Acknowledging that its polyvalent transmission of the original depends on a transformation of the original, via 'misreadings' and 'misunderstandings' which can shed light on aspects of the original that are under-read (53), Comber (55) writes, 'If Pound is wrong, he is productively and excitingly wrong. What more can one ask of any poet and translator?' Here, Comber exemplifies an ambiguous attitude in classics towards translation. On the one hand, there is a right way – Hale's linguistically accurate way, perhaps – and conversely, a wrong way to do it, as Pound may have. Yet, what exactly constitutes 'wrong' translation is rendered uncertain by Comber's use of the conditional mood; and even if Pound is wrong, his wrongness is

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nonetheless 'productive' and 'exciting' for Comber, a classicist, to consider in relation to Propertius' original works. But, if Pound is wrong, what is 'correct' translation in classics? And if wrong can be productive and exciting, then can wrong not still also be, to some extent, right?

Echoing this ambiguous attitude towards translation is recent classical scholarship, though explicit views about translation from translators themselves are unusual (Balmer, *Piecing Together* 4-7, 229). One lingering view of translation, partly born of the discipline's traditional pedagogical emphasis on linguistic ability and philology (Balmer, *Piecing Together* 4; Morley 13; cf. Whitmarsh 26-29), indeed echoes Hale, and 'continues to exert a good deal of force' in the discipline (Young 2): a good translation should convey the linguistic meaning(s) of the original text as accurately as possible. On this traditional view, the work of translators and adaptors has often been 'denigrated' as derivative (Balmer, *Piecing Together* 4; Comber 52). Meanwhile, the translator's greatest strength is remaining 'invisible' or 'transparent' in allowing the original author's intention to show through the translator's new medium (Venuti 1-7; Young 2).

One example of a 'literal and accurate' translation (Yatromanolakis, 'Review' 272) that embodies this traditional approach is Campbell's (*Sappho and Alcaeus* 53) literal prose version of Sappho's Fragment 1:

> Ornate-throned immortal Aphrodite, wile-weaving daughter of Zeus, I entreat you: do not overpower my heart, mistress, with ache and anguish, but come here, if ever in the past you heard my voice from afar and acquiesced and came, leaving your father's golden house…

While Campbell renders each Greek word (Sappho fr. 1.1-8) in English prose that is 'literal and accurate,' such translations privilege literal meanings over other translatable aspects of ancient texts and their contexts, thereby de-prioritising elements which may also be productive for classicists to study, as Comber notes above. For example, the fact that this translation is written in continuous English prose omits the poetic metre (Sapphic stanzas) of the Greek text; and while the quoted text corresponds to the first two stanzas of Sappho's Fragment 1, the English does not reflect the stanza structure.

Yet this traditional, philologically-focused type of translation co-exists with more creative modes of translation in classics which aim to convey poetic aspects of the original texts beyond the literal meaning(s) of their vocabulary and grammar. Williamson (186) remarks on the compromise that all translators of Sappho's poetry (and indeed, any poetry) must make: '[n]o English version could reproduce their exact literal meaning together with their impact as poetry.' Listing a range of Sappho translations available, Williamson implies the diversity of priorities that different translators and readers have, depending on their varying theoretical perspectives and interests (186-7, cf. Whitmarsh 29-32). Philological, linguistic priorities are catered to by translations which convey the original text's literal meanings. Contrasting historicist priorities are supported by poetic translations that aim to reconstruct the 'poetic impact' that the originals would have had in their historical contexts. Meanwhile, the priorities of reception theory are served by translations which convey the fragmentary status of Sappho's poetry alongside the poetic elements. Williamson legitimises creative approaches to translation alongside philological approaches, reflecting a growing acceptance of diverse theoretical priorities within classics (Young 5).

Regarding this plurality of priorities in classical translation, there are those who value some of these priorities more than others. For example, Yatromanolakis ('Review' 272) assesses Campbell's work in the context of his review of Carson's translations of Sappho's poetry:

> Compared to Mary Barnard's celebrated, but overly poeticized and 'reconstructive', renderings, or David Campbell's literal and accurate translations, Anne Carson's *If Not, Winter* stands out as a major attempt at recapturing the polysemic state of Sappho's fragments, as well as the echo of their original language.

For Yatromanolakis, Carson's work is judged favourably as a translation because her approach encompasses multiple priorities that readers of classical texts might have, without abandoning the traditionally sanctioned attention to the 'original language.' Carson exceeds Barnard and Campbell, by incorporating their historicist and philological priorities with the third priority of reflecting the fragmentary state of the

texts as they have been received. Barnard's work, meanwhile, addresses a historicist priority to reconstruct the poetic impact of the text by presenting some fragments as complete poems, but in doing so, is criticised as 'overly poeticized' – indeed, her creativity in poeticising the translations renders her, the translator, distastefully 'visible' to Yatromanolakis. It is telling that Campbell's more philological work is not similarly criticised, here, despite his (implicitly unfavourable) comparison to Carson's work: unlike Barnard, Campbell's more 'invisible' approach does not transgress the traditional view that translations should accurately reflect the original language. Indeed, Yatromanolakis' implicit boundary between 'right' and 'wrong' translation does not rule out Carson as *too* creative, since a traditional emphasis on the 'echo of the original language' is preserved in her work.

However, while Carson's version might strike the 'right' balance in translation for Yatromanolakis, a key aspect of Sappho's original poetic impact is omitted by all translators mentioned so far: the musical impact. A historicist approach (common in classics, Golden and Toohey 1-8), that aims at reconstructing original texts as they would have been understood in their original historical performance context(s), would benefit from exploring this (cf. Lardinois, 'Who Sang Sappho's Songs?'). Yet the fact that the Greek text is frequently translated to be read, rather than sung, causes the musical impact of the original to become under-emphasised in classical scholarship. This observation formed part of the basis for my decision to translate Sappho Fragment 1 musically. Indeed, as Comber observes in the case of Pound and Propertius, creative translations and versions, while being (conditionally, ambiguously) 'wrong' in that they abandon a traditional philological focus, can nonetheless (Comber 53) 'shed light… on under-read features conventional translations do not reach.'

However, Balmer (*Piecing Together* 183) notes that the potential of creative translation to contribute original and informed readings of classical texts to academic research in classics and classical reception – and therefore to *constitute*, rather than merely to serve the discipline – remains underexplored. She laments the lack of 'practitioner statements' given by translators of classical texts, statements which could forge a more overt, fruitful connection between the practices of classical

translation and research, by virtue of translators making the creative decisions behind their reception of classical works explicit (Balmer, *Piecing Together* 4-7, 229). In an attempt to redress this, it is within this framework that I situate a practitioner statement of my own, commenting on my classically-inspired choral compositions, 'The Lesbian Hymns,' which I entered into the Modern Classicisms Competition 2018. The competition, held by King's College London and the Courtauld Institute, invited students and staff from those institutions to submit creative contemporary takes on 'the classical' in any medium.

Here I will discuss how my versions transgress traditional, philologically-focused models of classical translation, and why this is productive for classical research, in illuminating avenues for interpretation and cross-cultural comparisons latent in these texts. The hymns are based on contrasting ancient perspectives on lesbian desire and the gods:[1] Sappho Fragment 1 and Ovid's story of Iphis from *Metamorphoses* 9.666-797. If they are performed together, then an archaic Greek perspective, which portrays female homoeroticism as divinely encouraged, is juxtaposed with a contrasting Augustan Roman perspective, which depicts female homoeroticism as viewed negatively by the gods. This juxtaposition of diverse ancient religious attitudes is effected through the medium of Anglican-style music, recalling the modern Anglican Church with its similarly diverging attitudes towards God and homoeroticism. While my creative translations significantly transform the original texts beyond the philological scope of their original languages, rendering my own creative intervention 'visible' in translation, my versions nonetheless encourage fruitful transhistorical comparisons between diverse ancient and modern Western religious attitudes towards female homoeroticism. In so doing, like Balmer (*Piecing Together* and *Sappho*) and other creative translators, I hope to show that 'wrong' classical translations can nonetheless also be 'right'.

1 Although classical scholars warn against referring to ancient sexuality with modern nomenclature (e.g. Whitmarsh 203, 206), I use 'lesbian' here and for the title of the hymns in the spirit of conspicuously resituating ancient narratives in a modern context through translation.

Echoing the Original: 'The Hymn to Aphrodite,' a Translation of Sappho Fragment 1

Sappho is famously one of the only ancient Greek female poets whose work survives in any substantial amount.[2] The *Suda*, a tenth-century CE encyclopaedia, credits Sappho with nine books of poetry, but almost all that survives of her work is fragmentary (Campbell, *Sappho and Alcaeus* 6-7). She was active in the sixth century BCE, and from the Roman period onwards, six hundred years after she lived, already held as a famous poet, she became known also for writing about 'her' (or her poetic persona's) love for other women (Ovid *Heroides* 15.15-20). This ongoing association of Sappho with female-female desire inspired the English adjective 'sapphic,'[3] as well as the adoption by lesbians of Sappho as a role model throughout history (Gubar 58; DeJean xv.). One of the only complete examples of Sappho's work is Fragment 1, which shows 'Sappho' praying to the goddess of love, Aphrodite, for help in assuaging her unrequited love for another (anonymous) female:

Eternal goddess on your throne,
I pray that you will hear me;
Spare my heart from the pain you impart,
Don't let your sorrows spear me.

When before you heard my cries,
From Heav'n, you came and helped me,
Leaving the halls and the golden walls
Of God, when you beheld me.

Your chariot was borne along
By sparrows through the ether;
Swiftly they whirled you over the world,

2 Although Sappho's works are the best-known and largest body of female-authored work to survive from antiquity, she was by no means the only female poet or author from the ancient world. Indeed, fragments of many others survive (Snyder *The Woman and the Lyre*; Plant).

3 The term 'lesbian' is also associated with Sappho's native Lesbos, but the link between Sappho's own supposed sexuality, her birthplace, and the word 'lesbian' is not as direct as is commonly believed, since the association of women from Lesbos with lesbian desire was produced by several ancient discourses, some of which did not directly implicate Sappho (Gilhuly).

So blessed, you came to me there.

A smile upon your deathless face,
You asked me why I called you;
For what madness turned me, who now had spurned
My love, and what could you do?

'Who, O Sappho, wrongs you now,
Who now needs persuading?
Who, yet again, in love will I bend,
Her heart, yet again, invading?

'If she flees, to you she'll run;
If gifts she shuns, she'll give them;
If she's above returning your love,
Then soon, love she'll feel, unbidden.'

Return here now, and quell that pain
My anguished heart's igniting,
Grant all I pray, be with me today,
My ally, with me fighting.

Above is my English translation of Sappho's Greek hymn. I have set these rhyming English words, which contain Christianising references to 'Heav'n' (line 6) and 'God' (line 8), to be sung to an original eight-bar, Anglican-style hymn chant, accompanied by organ or piano. An audio recording is available at www.modernclassicisms.com/competition. These performative specifications are in keeping with the (not rigid, but broadly characteristic) generic requirements of Christian hymns (e.g. Phillips 2-3): their language is overtly religious; their music is broadly accessible (Watson 4-5); they publicly worship the contextually relevant deity (Watson 8); they frequently rhyme and keep to a metre (Watson 30-36). But why should I have translated a non-Christian text as an Anglican-style hymn, a style of religious singing that did not develop until centuries after Sappho lived? Why should the musical conventions of a monotheistic religion, which excludes the worship of other gods, be appropriate for translating a text that worships the ancient Greek goddess Aphrodite? I aim to translate the text culturally, rather than

only linguistically. In terms of religious function, there is a compelling parallel between Sappho's text and Anglican hymns: Christian hymns are a cultural mechanism through which the Church disseminates Christian mythology accessibly among lay people (Adey 2-3), similarly to how Sappho's text musically communicates a mythological religious narrative about Aphrodite.

How do we know that Sappho's text was originally composed as an ancient Greek hymn? While scholars are divided on whether or not Sappho's hymn was composed as a 'serious' hymn or a parody,[4] they agree that it shares formal features of ancient Greek hymns and prayers **(**Furley and Bremer 1-8, esp. 3). For example, characteristic of a hymn, fr. 1 has a tripartite structure (Budelmann 115) consisting of i) invocation, including epithets (fr. 1.1-2, cf. 'Hymn to Aphrodite,' line 1; Campbell, *Greek Lyric Poetry* 264-5); ii) praise (fr. 1.1-2, 13-14, cf. 'Hymn to Aphrodite,' lines 1, 12, 13) and reminders of past interactions, including a narrative (fr. 1.5-24, cf. 'Hymn to Aphrodite,' lines 5-24; Campbell *ibid*., Hutchinson 152); and iii) a request (fr. 1.2, 3, 5, 25, 27, cf. 'Hymn to Aphrodite,' lines 2, 3, 25, 27). Additionally, its compositional artistry (Pulleyn 49-50; Furley and Bremer 3), poetic metre and thus musical performability (Budelmann 116, 22) are also typical of hymns (Furley and Bremer 4). There are two main differences between Sappho's text and many other ancient Greek hymns: firstly, the apparent humour, which arises from the goddess' implicit exasperation as she asks why 'now again' (δηῦτε, fr. 1.16, cf. lines 19-20) Sappho has called, and whom 'now again' (δηῦτε, fr. 1.18) Sappho wishes the goddess to persuade to lead her into love.[5] The implication that Sappho calls on her often for the same problem creates a potentially humorous sense that the goddess is

4 For a 'serious' reading of Sappho fr. 1, see Campbell *Greek Lyric Poetry* 265-6. For interpretations of the text as 'humorous,' see e.g. Page 12-18 (esp. 15-16), Budelmann 115, 118-120 (esp. 13-24n.). For an interpretation that blends humour with 'seriousness,' see Hutchinson 150, which discusses Aphrodite's 'light-hearted teasing' alongside '…the extraordinary intimacy between goddess and mortal…'

5 However, humour does feature in some other Greek hymns, notably the *Homeric Hymns* to Hermes and Aphrodite (Brillet-Dubois, Vergados). Humour in any case does not prevent Fragment 1 as a hymn from achieving its characteristic purpose of worshiping Aphrodite via flattery, reminiscence, and praise (Furley and Bremer 6); for example, Sappho praises Aphrodite through the adjective 'blessed' ('Hymn to Aphrodite,' line 12), ὦ μάκαιρα (fr. 1.17).

teasing her for this (Page 15-16; Stanley 306; Zellner 438, 435 n. 3; Burnett 245-46; Hutchinson 155-7; Budelmann 119). The second difference between this text and other ancient Greek hymns is the supposedly more 'personal' relationship between the goddess and the human making the prayer, here Sappho (Stanley 316; n. 47: Cameron, 'Aphrodite Again' 238; Wilson 22; Hutchinson 150), which portrays Aphrodite as more benign to Sappho than she is to mortals elsewhere, as in *Iliad* 3.399-420 where she malevolently forces Helen to sleep with Paris against her will (Hutchinson *ibid.*).[6]

However, regardless of whether it was 'serious' or jocular, the Greek poetry performed with musical accompaniment (Lardinois, 'Who Sang Sappho's Songs?' 152-3) would have clearly evoked the generic tendencies of hymns, protean though these were (Furley and Bremer 2), for an ancient audience (Snyder 'Public Occasion,' 6; Page 16). Although the appearance of Sappho's name in four fragments (frs. 1, 65, 94, 133) results in the frequent assumption that Sappho performed her compositions herself as a soloist (DeJean 129), Lardinois shows that other ancient Greek poets include their names and personae in texts that were created for choral performance ('Who Sang Sappho's Songs?' 153). Therefore, we do not know whether this hymn was originally performed by a chorus, or by a solo singer, although ancient anecdotes and vase paintings suggest that, in later antiquity, Sappho's songs were performed both by groups and by soloists at symposia (Lardinois *ibid.*, cf. Yatromanolakis *Sappho in the Making* 63-88).

However, the majority of English translations of Sappho's texts are written to be read as poetry or prose (Williamson 186-7; Reynolds 8). Here, a crucial impact of the original text – the religious music, and the live performance – is lost. Addressing this loss, some musicians and classicists have reconstructed ancient music, including Sappho's, to give audiences an impression of what it might have sounded like in antiquity. The ancient commentator Aristoxenus says that Sappho used the

6 I say 'supposedly' because there is some disagreement as to how uniquely 'personal' Sappho fr. 1 is. For example, Lardinois ('Review') argues, in his review of Wilson, 'There is… nothing subversive about Sappho's adaptation of the cletic hymn in fr. 1. It is a standard type of prayer that was widely used by the archaic Greek poets to voice personal requests, including divine help with love (cf. Anacreon fr. 357).'

mixolydian mode (fr. 81, Campbell *Sappho and Alcaeus* 35, n. 2; Pseudo-Plutarch *On Music* 16.1136d, Campbell *ibid.*), and from Sappho's texts and visual depictions of her on Greek vases, we know that the musical instrument associated with her was the *barbitos* (Yatromanolakis, *Sappho in the Making* 69, 74, 89). Drawing on this information, as well as on the fragments' usual metre, Sapphic stanzas, and what has been recently discovered of other, later ancient Greek musical notation (D'Angour, 'The Musical Setting' 64-5), D'Angour has set the Greek text of Sappho's recently discovered 'Brothers Poem' to music ('Sappho's new poem sung'), while De Guzman has set Sappho Fragment 1 (and many other ancient texts) to music ('The Invocation to Aphrodite'). These versions reflect what original ancient performances might have been like.

While such interpretations do convey the musicality of the original, they sound unfamiliar to a contemporary Anglophone ear, because they are reconstructions of ancient music. They do not attempt to give contemporary audiences an equivalent cultural, religious experience that the original may have created for ancient audiences. Rather, these versions keep the text grounded in the 'deep' past, unfamiliar to and unreachable by contemporary Anglophone listeners, who are less likely to have a 'horizon of expectations' surrounding ancient Greek religious music than they are surrounding more familiar religious musical styles from their own societies (see Jauss 11, 13, 18-19, for discussion of an audience's 'horizon of expectations'). However, the original music and text would have been familiar to the original audience, owing to the recognisable generic markers of the texts as a hymn. Therefore, a translator aiming to retain the performative religious effects of the original should aim at cultural and musical, as well as linguistic, religious familiarity for their audience. There are a few versions of Sappho's fragments which lend a contemporary Anglophone audience some musical familiarity, through, for example, sung English text (as opposed to the use of ancient Greek in D'Angour and De Guzman's versions), such as Campkin's choral work, 'Unleash the Beauty of Your Eyes' (a translation of Fragment 31), and Rorem's madrigal, 'My Lady

Paphos' (a version of Fragment 1).[7] However, Rorem's madrigal omits the specifically religious impact of the original Fragment 1.

My major motivation for translating Fragment 1 as an Anglican hymn is to address the lack of emphasis on the original's impact as a musical religious performance in existing translations and musical versions. Nonetheless, my version allows some ambiguities surrounding the interpretation and performance of the original to remain open. Whether the original was intended to be serious or not, my translation works both as a typical Anglican-style hymn and as a parody. It is a typical hymn, with English rhymes in consistently structured verses, as well as in its four-part choral arrangement and organ or piano accompaniment. Yet its inclusion in each verse of one 5/4 bar (five crotchet beats in the bar, with the extra beat corresponding with the last line of each stanza, e.g. line 4: 'Don't let,' line 8: 'Of God'), amongst the remaining 4/4 bars (four crotchet beats per bar), is atypical, since most hymns have simple and consistent time signatures (i.e. consistently either three or four crotchet beats per bar; see e.g. *Common Praise*). This lengthening metrical irregularity somewhat reverses that of Sapphic stanzas, in which the final line is shorter than the other lines. Adding to its metrical idiosyncrasy, my version more overtly parodies a Christian hymn through its praise of Aphrodite rather than the Judeo-Christian God, drawing on the divine epiphany of Aphrodite to Sappho, rather than liturgical or Biblical texts, thus precluding it from becoming a serious performative act of Christian worship in a church service. My translation also admits some unconventionality through its compromise on the possibility that the texts might have originally been performed by a soloist. My version is choral, but the score includes two optional solo verses for the fifth and sixth stanzas, which convey the voice of Aphrodite, even though Anglican hymns are generally congregational (i.e. without solos) throughout their duration (as in e.g. *Common Praise*).

By virtue of incorporating attention to these issues of interpretation and performance, my translation is informed by academic research. Yet unlike traditional translations, I have frequently prioritised recreating

7 Cf. Natalie Clifford Barney's musical re-enactments of Sappho's fragments at her Parisian homes in the 1890s and 1900s (Dorf 47-78).

the musical religious impact of Fragment 1 over conveying the philological meaning of the original text, such that my version can aptly be termed 'transgressive' of traditional classical translation. I shall briefly outline how some of these transgressions are, nonetheless, justifiable in amplifying the original's religious musical impact.

One key transgression relates to naming. Sappho's text includes detailed names and epithets for Aphrodite and Zeus, opening with 'Immortal Aphrodite of the many-coloured throne, child of Zeus, weaver of wiles' (Sappho fr. 1.1-2: ποικιλόθρον' ἀθανάτ' Ἀφρόδιτα, / παῖ Δίος δολόπλοκε, cf. 'Hymn to Aphrodite,' line 1). The text also later refers to the 'golden home of the father' (Sappho fr. 1. 7-8: πάτρος δὲ δόμον… χρύσιον, cf. 'Hymn to Aphrodite,' line 7), again emphasising the familial relationship between Aphrodite and Zeus. However, although my version contains a shortened version of Aphrodite's epithet ('Hymn to Aphrodite,' line 1: 'Eternal… on your throne'), her name, and the explicit references to her as the daughter of Zeus, are omitted from my translation. This is to ensure the recognisability of the text as an Anglican-style hymn to a contemporary Anglophone audience. The descriptive address of Aphrodite as 'Eternal goddess' marks the opening as a religious invocation to those who may be unfamiliar with the names of the Greek gods. Secondly, the anonymous address as goddess also plays into Christian conventions of naming God, since God's true name (Yahweh or Jehovah) is frequently left unspoken.[8] Thus, Zeus becomes 'God' rather than Zeus. This replacement of 'Zeus' (Sappho fr. 1.2: Δίος) and 'father' (Sappho fr. 1.7: πάτρος) with 'God' ('Hymn to Aphrodite,' line 7) creates a contrast between the lower case 'goddess' and the upper case 'God,' thus hinting at the impossibility in a Christian hymn of addressing the goddess Aphrodite, a goddess from a polytheistic culture, in terms truly equal to the God of a monotheistic and patriarchal religion (Miller 62). My non-literal approach to naming therefore reflects the religious context into which I am translating, alongside the impossibility of truly composing a Christian hymn for an ancient Greek goddess.

8 E.g. *Common Praise* hymn nos. 7 ('O Splendour of God's Glory Bright'), 14 ('Glory to thee, my God, this night') and 15 ('God that madest earth and heaven') do not name God.

My version also obscures a key ambiguity of the original text. My version has Aphrodite state that not only will the beloved eventually stop fleeing and start chasing, but that she will specifically be chasing Sappho herself ('Hymn to Aphrodite,' line 21: 'If she flees, to you she'll run'). The interpretation that the beloved will chase Sappho is common in scholarly literature on Fragment 1, and appears in some translations (Page 14-15; Carson, 'Justice' 227; Dover 177; DeJean 32; Powell 4). However, as Carson has shown, the Greek text does not specify in the equivalent line (fr. 1.21) that Sappho will be chased by the beloved (*ibid.*). Rather, the Greek text simply states, 'Even if she flees, soon she will chase.' There is no explicit direct object of the chasing (Sappho fr. 1.21: καὶ γὰρ αἰ φεύγει, ταχέως διώξει). While it is possible that she will chase Sappho, this is by no means the only likely possibility. Indeed, Carson argues that Sappho might be asking the goddess to exact vengeance on her beloved by causing her the pain of unrequited love for someone else, a common sentiment elsewhere in ancient Greek lyric poetry (Carson, 'Justice' 229).

However, the Greek hints at lines 18-19 that Sappho desires a reciprocal relationship with the beloved, when Aphrodite asks, 'whom do I persuade to lead you into your love? Who, O Sappho, wrongs you?' (Sappho fr. 1. 18-20: τίνα δηῦτε πείθω / …σ'ἄγην ἐς σὰν φιλότατα; τίς σ', ὦ / Ψάπφ', ἀδίκησι; cf. 'Hymn to Aphrodite' lines 17-20.)[9] '[L]ead you into your love' (σ'ἄγην ἐς σὰν φιλότατα) is an elusive phrase, which Budelmann (119) suggests would work better as 'bring you… to *her* love' (my emphasis) on a reading of σὰν as ϝὰν. Either way, it seems that Sappho has asked the goddess to persuade the beloved to 'lead' Sappho into some kind of reciprocal love relationship or sexual act.[10] The phrase 'to lead you into your love' (or 'her love') could mean little else in the context of a prayer to the goddess of love. After Aphrodite asks these questions, she then promises that the beloved will chase, rather than flee (etc., fr. 1.21-4, cf. 'Hymn to Aphrodite,' lines 21-4). The structure of the text implies

9 Voigt's and Lobel and Page's editions both render the first legible word of line 19 as σάγην (29), which does not result in a complete infinitive that would make sense here in ancient Greek. I follow Lobel's suggestion of σ'ἄγην, an elision of σε, 'you,' and ἄγην, 'to lead' (Lobel and Page 3, Budelmann 36).

10 The noun φιλότης, 'love' (Sappho fr. 1.19), in an erotic context, can refer to sexual intercourse in ancient Greek (Calame 40-3, see 40 n. 2).

that Aphrodite's promise of a reversal of the beloved's actions are a direct result of Aphrodite persuading the beloved to 'lead' Sappho into her (whether Sappho's own, or the beloved's) love. Therefore, the inference that the direct object of the beloved's 'chasing' is, in fact, Sappho, is textually supported, even while it is not textually explicit at Sappho fr. 1.21. The narrative of the Greek text, a goddess apparently facilitating, and thereby accepting and encouraging, Sappho's desire for a reciprocal (to an unspecified extent) same-sex love relationship in the context of a publicly performed religious hymn, becomes more overt through my version.

Although my translation can be said to misrepresent the literal, philologically-grounded meaning(s) of the original text in certain ways, these transgressions of traditional norms of classical translation are justifiable, in that they ultimately serve the purpose of culturally translating the often-understated religious musical impact of the original. Moreover, as we shall see, in contemporary performance, this hymn on the theme of same-sex desire has the potential to speak pertinently to contemporary religious and political contexts (cf. Balmer, *Piecing Together* 104-5). This comparison can be made more politically poignant when performed alongside another, contrasting ancient religious perspective on female-female desire.

Echoing the Original: 'The Hymn of Iphis,' an Interpretation of Ovid Metamorphoses 9.666-797

Writing six hundred years later than Sappho, Ovid was a Roman poet from the first centuries BCE and CE. His epic *Metamorphoses* offers a perspective on female homoeroticism and the gods that contrasts with Sappho Fragment 1, through the story of Iphis and Ianthe (*Metamorphoses* 9.666-797):

'There are two things that I pray,
That your pain be relieved,
And that your womb will give away
A boy by us conceived.
The other type of child would be
A burden, weak and shy.
So, if a female child I see,

Then, Heav'n forbid, she'll die.'

The husband's words upset his wife,
Whose pain a goddess quells,
'You asked, I came, forget your strife,
For you have served me well.
Your husband gave some harsh commands
That may well be ignored.
So, may the child, whate'er its brand,
By you be well adored.'

When the mother bore a girl,
The father was deceived:
She said, 'We'll feed him!' and the world,
Except the nurse, believed.
The name of Iphis soon they chose,
And put clothes on the child.
The name fit either sex, the clothes,
On either sex, beguiled.

Her father, after thirteen years,
Chose Ianthe as her bride.
In looks, the two girls were close peers,
And age, schooled side by side.
Equal was the love they shared,
Unequal, though, their dreams:
Ianthe for a husband cared,
The man that Iphis seems.

The girl who loved another girl,
The tearful Iphis cried,
'What monstrous love the gods unfurled,
To ruin me, despised!
No mare has ever loved a mare,
No cow another cow.
How with Ianthe could I share
My love, after our vows?'

Her mother, on the wedding's morn,
Addressed the goddess nigh,

'O goddess of the seven horns,[11]
Do not your help deny!'
The altar moved, the temple shook,
The mother watched her daughter:
Longer strides the child now took,
Voice deeper now, hair shorter.

As a boy, could Iphis say
His votive thanks to Isis:
'*Dona puer solvit quae*
Femina voverat Iphis.'[12]
Don't shy from faith, but give your thanks
At temples with great joy!
For, looking on, gods swelled the ranks,
As Ianthe wed her boy.

Again, I have set the above text to an original Anglican-style hymn chant, to be accompanied by piano or organ.[13] 'The Hymn of Iphis' was awarded second prize in the Modern Classicisms Competition (see above, p. 4). Yet, belying its success as a translation from a traditional point of view, recreating the tale of Iphis as an Anglican hymn significantly departs from both the philology of the original language and the performative impact of the original text. The epic Latin poem from which the tale is taken, the *Metamorphoses*, was published in 8 AD. Unlike Sappho, Ovid did not compose for musical performance. However, the *Metamorphoses* would have been semi-publicly recited at *recitationes*, which were readings from raised platforms before the author's invited audiences (Winsbury 95, 97), as well as likely circulated amongst a mainly upper-class audience for them to read privately (Citroni 21). Iphis' story was one of over two hundred and fifty myths recounted in Latin hexameter verses. Therefore, my hymn separates the story from its original epic context, and provides religious musical accompaniment where there would have been none for the original when recited. The Latin text of the story is 131 lines long, and flows continuously rather than being broken

11 '[S]even horns' refers not to the physical appearance of the goddess, but to her dominion over the River Nile 'of the seven horns divided' (Ovid *Met.* 9.773-5).
12 The Latin text of lines 51-2 quotes Ovid *Metamorphoses* 9.794.
13 A recording is available at www.modernclassicisms.com/competition.

up into stanzas like hymns. However, the longest hymns in *Common Praise* tend to be between forty and sixty lines long,[14] which determined the much shorter length of my own text.

Each verse of the hymn corresponds to a major narrative event from the original.[15] However, some of Ovid's poetic devices; names and

14 Hymns no. 380, 'At the Name of Jesus,' and no. 112, 'My Song is Love Unknown,' have identical structures to 'The Hymn of Iphis,' containing seven verses of eight lines each. Other hymns of similar length include: no. 128, 'All glory, laud and honour' (60 lines); no. 119, 'O sacred head, sore wounded' (40 lines); no. 86, 'From the eastern mountains' (48 lines); no. 80, 'Christingle' (52 lines); no. 549, 'Onward Christian soldiers' (60 lines). No. 586, 'The God of Abraham Praise' (80 lines), no. 149, 'Light's glittering morn bedecks the sky' (78 lines), and No. 81, 'O Come All Ye Faithful' (70 lines) exceed this general rule of length. All these hymns are from *Common Praise.*

15 Here is a summary of how each verse corresponds to Ovid's narrative:

> 1. Iphis' father, Ligdus, makes his two prayers, warning Telethusa that they will have to kill a baby girl (Ovid *Met*. 9.675-9).
>
> 2. The goddess Isis appears to Telethusa (Iphis' mother) in a dream, telling her that she does not need to obey Ligdus' command to kill a baby girl (*ibid.* 684-701).
>
> 3. Telethusa pretends that Iphis is a boy, by giving her an androgynous name and clothing (*ibid.* 708-10), and everybody believes this except the nurse (*ibid.* 705-7).
>
> 4. Ligdus betroths Iphis to Ianthe, of the same age and educated together (*ibid.* 718-19). The two girls love one another equally (*ibid.* 720-1), which contrasts with their unequal expectations of the wedding (*ibid.* 721-5).
>
> 5. Iphis is distressed at the gods allowing her to love Ianthe contrary to nature (756-9); she interprets her lesbian desire as unnatural (*ibid.* 758-9) including her observation that cows and mares do not love other cows and mares (*ibid.* 731). She does not believe that she will be able to consummate her marriage to Ianthe (*ibid.* 749-54, 759-63), despite their mutual love.
>
> 6. Telethusa invokes the 'goddess of the seven horns,' i.e. Isis (literally 'goddess of Paraetonium, the Mareotic fields, Pharos, and the Nile of seven horns divided'), to ask for help (*ibid.* 773-5). In response, the temple doors shake (*ibid.* 783) and the altar moves (*ibid.* 782), and subsequently Iphis develops more masculine physical features (*ibid.* 785-791), among these a 'bigger step' (*ibid.* 787: *maiore gradu*) and shorter hair (*ibid.* 789: *brevior… capillis*).
>
> 7. Iphis thanks the goddess Isis by devoting a votive inscription at her temple (*ibid.* 790-794). The reader is invited to 'give offerings at temples and rejoice with faith, not fear!' (*ibid.* 791-2: *date munera templis / nec timida gaudete fide!*). The gods of marriage,

epithets;[16] minor narrative details or events, such as Ianthe's excitement and prayers about her forthcoming marriage (Ovid *Met.* 9.764-5); and mythological references, particularly Iphis' invocation of Paisphae and Daedelus (*ibid.* 735-43), are omitted for economy. Generally, I exclude details which are likely unfamiliar to contemporary Anglophone audiences (i.e. mythological references and epithets) and also unnecessary to communicating the major elements of the narrative. Consequently, unlike 'The Hymn to Aphrodite,' 'The Hymn of Iphis' obscures many components of the original text, including its genre, performative context and mythological content. This raises the question: why should an Anglican-style hymn seem an appropriate contemporary communicative vehicle for this ancient tale?

Throughout Ovid's tale, there are frequent references to prayer, piety and divine intervention. Indeed, every point of the narrative either hinges directly on the gods, or humans' relations with the divine. The Roman gods, both imported from Egypt (Isis, Ovid *Met.* 9. 773-5) and more traditional Roman divinities (Venus, Juno and Hymen, *ibid.* 796-7), are therefore at the forefront of a narrative which condemns female homoeroticism.[17] This condemnation is especially evident through Iphis' words at *Met.* 9. 728-30, which I translate here:

> *si di me parcere uellent,*
> *parcere debuerant; si non, et perdere uellent,*
> *naturale malum saltem et de more dedissent.*
>
> If the gods wished to spare me,
> they ought to have spared me; if not, and they wished to destroy me,

Venus, Juno, and Hymen, attend the wedding (*ibid.* 796-7), implying their approval of the (now) heterosexual union.

16 E.g. References to Crete (Ovid *Met.* 9.666) and Isis' divine Egyptian companions (687-94) are omitted, as is Isis' full epithet at 773-4. My omission of Crete further divorces this tale from its original mythological context, since the setting links Iphis' story to other tales of 'grotesque' Cretan female sexuality (Armstrong 110, 132-3).

17 Cf. Makowski 30: 'However, it is the *Metamorphoses* which contains Ovid's most damning denunciation of homosexuality. This occurs in the story of Iphis…' Given the differing geographical origins of these gods, their approval of the heterosexual ending of the tale arguably implies that heterosexual marriage is 'universally' approved of by gods regardless of whether they are originally Roman.

> they would have granted at least a natural evil, and one that was customary.

Iphis implies that the gods, by not sparing her from her love for Ianthe, are harming her in a way that is contrary to nature and custom.[18] Unknown to Iphis, one goddess will eventually both spare and 'destroy' her, by transforming her. Ovid's religious condemnation of female homoeroticism is also evident through Isis' physical transformation of Iphis into a 'real' boy (*ibid*. 785-91) following Telethusa's prayer for help, so that the wedding can go ahead. Isis thus ensures a 'happy,' heterosexual ending, underscored by divine attendance of the wedding (*ibid*. 796-7).

Moreover, the end of the story addresses readers directly, urging them to rejoice faithfully and give their own votive offerings (*ibid*. 791-2), which I echo at 'Hymn of Iphis,' lines 53-4: 'Don't shy from faith, but give your thanks / At temples with great joy!' Not only is this story religious within the narrative, but these lines explicitly address the 'real-life' religious sensibilities of Ovid's Roman readers, which may have been stirred by performance at a *recitatio* in a similar way to how a Christian hymn might stir the religious sensibilities of a modern counterpart hearing Christian hymns sung at school or on the radio (Bradley 1, cf. Watson 5), though outside a formal religious performative context. While other discussions of the tale do discuss the involvement of the gods, they tend to foreground only occasionally and briefly how Ovid's implicit condemnation of homoeroticism intersects with the tale's everyday religious significance.[19]

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18 N.B. This contrasts with Iphis' later statement that 'no part of her prayers has been vain,' and that nature 'alone' is to blame for harming her (Ovid *Met.* 9. 755-9). This admits some ambiguity into Iphis' perception of the gods: either they are harming her by not sparing her, or nature alone is to blame. While I read the tale as condemning female homoeroticism from a religious point of view, Ovid does not leave this as the only possible way of interpreting the story, but 'point[s] in several directions' (Pintabone 278).

19 The following discuss the gods, but religion is not the main focus: e.g. Wheeler 191, 194, 199; Walker 205, 214, 217, 219, 220; Hallett 260; Ormand 88, 95, 100. There are some brief considerations of the tale's everyday religious significance: Pintabone (267) discusses how Iphis' *pietas* (piety) accords with 'Roman standards of acceptable and proper behavior,' such that '…Iphis seems to have proper respect for the Roman deities.' Pintabone leaves implicit that Iphis remaining female after marrying Ianthe would disrespect the Roman deities. Ormand is

As Pintabone (267), Ormand (95) and Brooten (205) indicate, though, the real-life religious resonance of the tale is significant in the narrative. As a boy, Iphis thanks Isis with a votive offering at the temple, on which he inscribes one line of Latin to thank the goddess (Ovid *Met.* 9.794): *dona puer solvit quae / femina voverat Iphis,* or, in English, 'the boy, Iphis, gives gifts which he had promised as a woman.' Iphis' offering of a votive inscription of thanks reflected a typical Roman means of performing gratitude to the gods (Rüpke 154-65; Hickson Hahn 235-41). Therefore, Iphis' conventionally pious votive offering to Isis legitimates the divine transformation of Iphis into a man, and the concomitant avoidance of a lesbian ending, in a way that was familiar in everyday religious terms to Roman readers.

'The Hymn of Iphis' emphasises this everyday religious familiarity to a contemporary Anglophone audience through the formal conventions of Anglican hymns, and, in the first and last verses, some musical evocation of plainchant, through the use of a drone in the vocal accompaniment of the tune (Swain 100, n. 6). An especially transgressive approach to traditional classical translation further amplifies the religious impact of the original. I quote Iphis' inscription in the original Latin, at 'Hymn of Iphis,' lines 51-2, pointedly not translating it. However, while votive offerings of inscriptions are not given in contemporary Anglican churches in the United Kingdom,[20] performing hymns remains a widespread Christian custom for thanking, praising and worshipping God (Jefferson xii; Adey 5-6; Watson 8). Relatedly, the Latin language features significantly in the Western tradition of hymnody (e.g. Phillips 48; Jefferson 160-62), and the language retains religious associations in modern Christianity. Some Christian choral music, such as Byrd's 'Ave Verum Corpus,' is sung in Latin as an anthem in church services (hence its inclusion in King and Rutter); other Christian choral music interweaves Latin and English text together, as in Britten's 'Hymn to the

more explicit (95), noting, '[i]t is inappropriate for Juno and Hymenaeus to attend a wedding where there is nobody who leads – i.e., no man – and both parties are to play the passive part.' Brooten (205) also mentions the Iphis tale as an example of gods being intolerant of desire between women.

20 While some Anglican churches offer votive candles in honour of the dead, the practice is not universal (Geddes and Griffiths 68).

Virgin' or Pearsall's arrangement of the traditional carol 'In Dulci Jubilo.' Iphis' conventional offering to the goddess is culturally transposed through my quotation of the inscription, since Latin in a hymn evinces a contemporary means by which religious gratitude might analogously be expressed.

My Anglican recreation emphasises the everyday religious impact of the original tale, which is not usually foregrounded in reception. Ovid's literary reputation as 'fun' largely precludes his work from being portrayed as seriously engaged with the religious mores of his time (with the exception of the *Fasti*: Hejduk 45-6, 57-8). Building on Hejduk's argument, 'The Hymn of Iphis' can similarly challenge the assumption that Ovid is not seriously concerned with Roman religion, underlining, rather, that his depiction of female homoeroticism is inextricably interwoven with everyday Roman religious practices.

Resounding into the Present: 'The Lesbian Hymns' in Performance

Classical translation can mobilise ancient texts to communicate politically to the contemporary concerns of the translator and their readers (Balmer, *Piecing Together* 104-5, 140). Similarly, 'The Lesbian Hymns' have the potential to speak into contemporary political religious debates, which invite comparison between the diverse ancient and modern religious approaches to sexuality. This can challenge homogenising perceptions of ancient societies as fundamentally 'other' regarding homoeroticism, compared with modern Western societies (Halperin 3-4; cf. Sedgwick 47, Traub 24-5). As in contemporary Christianity, within and across denominations (e.g. Hassett 47-8; Robinson; Beeching x, 146-8; Marin 16-22), ancient Greco-Roman religious beliefs surrounding sexuality and female homoeroticism were pluralistic and, sometimes, in conflict (Brooten 16-17).

When performed together, 'The Lesbian Hymns' dramatise a contrast between ancient Greek and Roman religious perspectives on same-sex desire. While Sappho Fragment 1 portrays (to some extent reciprocal) female same-sex desire positively in the eyes of sixth-century BCE Aphrodite through Aphrodite's previous help of Sappho (fr. 1.21-4, 'Hymn to Aphrodite,' lines 21-4), Ovid presents a fundamental incompatibility between the notion of consummating female same-sex desire ('Hymn of

Iphis,' lines 39-40; Ovid *Met.* 9. 749-54, 759-63), and what is acceptable to the first century (BCE and CE) Roman gods. The synchronic dramatization in performance of this diachronic contrast, through the modern conventions of Anglican hymns, invites a contemporary audience to compare these divergent ancient religious perspectives with contemporary Anglican ones (and, perhaps, other relevant religious perspectives that may shape their horizon of expectations for Christianised music (cf. Jauss 11, 13), such as Evangelical Christian perspectives (Marin 16-22)). The historical, linguistic and cultural boundaries that separate ancient Greek, ancient Roman, and contemporary perspectives are thus broken down. The contrast between the two hymns directly mirrors the conflict in the contemporary Anglican Church on the issues of homosexuality and gay marriage, thus forging a transhistorical link between ancient and modern conflicting religious perspectives on female homoeroticism.

This national and international Anglican conflict consists in the question of whether it is acceptable, according to scripture and God, for Christians to act on homoerotic feelings and have same-sex romantic and sexual relationships (Brittain and McKinnon 351-3). There is further debate around whether the Church should officially recognise homosexual unions in official religious ceremonies or blessings, or adhere to the scriptural definition of heterosexual marriage (May; Hassett 76, 78-9). Progressive churches, such as the Scottish Episcopal Church, can be interpreted as reflecting Sappho Fragment 1, in its official approval of same-sex relationships and acceptance of same-sex marriages in church. Likewise, Aphrodite encourages Sappho's homoerotic desire to become reciprocal, by promising a reversal of her beloved's affections ('Hymn to Aphrodite,' lines 17-24; Sappho fr. 1.17-24).[21] However, more conservative churches, such as the Churches of England and Wales, mirror the disapproving religious perspective in Ovid's story. For these more conservative churches, only heterosexual marriage is acceptable in the eyes of God. Echoing this belief, Iphis says that if the gods wanted to

21 By 'Sappho's homoerotic desire,' I refer only to the desire expressed by the persona in Fragment 1, rather than the desires of the historical person, Sappho, whose biography cannot be inferred unproblematically from her works (Ludov 204, Williamson 5).

destroy her, they would at least have afflicted her with a malady that was 'natural'; she sees her homoerotic desire as an unprecedented, unnatural affliction (Ovid *Met.* 9. 727-30). Isis later carries out Iphis' wish to be spared by the gods, by transforming Iphis into a boy in answer to his mother's prayer (Ovid *Met.* 9.785-91). Venus, Juno and Hymen, the goddesses of marriage, show their approval of this outcome by attending Iphis' heterosexual wedding (*ibid.* 796-97).

'The Lesbian Hymns' thus dramatise a politically pertinent divide between contemporary religious perspectives on homoeroticism. However, the hymns do not explicitly comment on the Anglican Church's conflict. Rather, they reflect it, allowing opposing views to co-exist in performance, whilst maintaining their distance from contemporary debate by means of their ancient source texts. This political mirroring transgresses traditional classical translations of ancient texts, in that the hymns do not privilege philological readings ahead of cultural, political, and religious readings of the texts. Rather, 'The Lesbian Hymns' show that the ancient world can reflect our own political and religious concerns, and thus advocate for continued contemporary engagement with classical antiquity. Each hymn, on its own, transgresses traditional classical translation in order to emphasise the often understated religious musical impact (for Sappho), and everyday religious resonances (for Ovid), in the original texts. Yet it is only when each text, divorced from its original context, gains a new performative context alongside one another in the present day – thus transgressing another historicising tendency of classicists to ground ancient texts exclusively or predominantly in their original historical contexts (Halperin 2; Golden and Toohey 1-8) – that their contemporary political resonance is realised.

In conclusion, 'The Lesbian Hymns' justify their transgressions by offering original readings of Sappho and Ovid, in diachronic dialogue both with one another and our contemporary society. This illuminates transhistorical similarities regarding the diversity and conflict of religious approaches to same-sex desire. This attention to ancient and modern similarities around homoeroticism complements historicist classical scholarship, which often emphasises the differences between ancient and modern homoeroticism (Halperin 2, 8-9; Williamson 92-103). 'The Lesbian Hymns' can therefore contribute valuable readings and

cross-cultural comparisons to classical and comparative research. Transgressing the norms of traditional classical translation emerges as productive, and indeed 'right,' for the discipline.

EDITORIAL NOTE

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