DGA FAL REPORT

Duke Gay Alliance meetings are scheduled for the second and fourth Sundays of every month during the school year, at 7:00 PM in the East Campus Center.

A small information library of books and periodicals on gay subjects is maintained in the DGA office, 205 East Campus Center, open weekdays from 2-5 PM.

The Alliance is cooperating with the Human Sexuality Information & Counselling Center for private counselling, which may be arranged by calling 684-3043 or 684-2618. The Lesbian Rap Group and the Alliance are available for talks to classes and other groups. Small discussion groups meet weekly. For further information call the Alliance at 3043; for the women's group, contact Debbie at 471-1197.

SOME IMPRESSIONS OF THE DUKE GAY ALLIANCE

Some important aspects of life inevitably elude analysis, and my involvement in the Alliance over the past seven months is no exception. But I feel it important to try to interpret something this exciting and potentially meaningful to the Duke community.

I sense that most people at Duke think of the Alliance as a very mysterious organization, and that what would happen at a typical meeting defies the imagination. (Almost: judging from reactions in the ASDU suggestion box, some minds have been quite up to the challenge.)

Before I attended my first meeting last Spring, my own imaginings had kept up with those of the worst of the Alliance's opponents. And I guess a part of that was still being afraid of myself, and of what it meant to be gay.

(continued on page 2)
I had suspected since my junior year in high school that I might be 'queer'. After a little experimentation, I decided that the gay lifestyle was definitely not for me. But by the time Sophomore year at Duke rolled around, I realized that there was nothing to be done about it: I was gay after all.

O.K. Fine. So what now? At the time, there was nothing like the Alliance, so I read a lot of bathroom graffiti and did a lot of hoping, but never had the nerve to really meet anyone, and certainly not to do anything. When I returned last spring after a year away from Duke, there was a Gay Alliance; and although my impressions of the Alliance were vague and unfavorable, my impressions of gay bars were much worse, so I went to a DGA meeting.

When I walked into the East Campus Center, I expected a lot of bizarre limp-wristed stereotypes. To walk in and find a group of really looked no different than my dorm course in auto-mechanics was no small surprise. As one of the fellows introduced me to the twenty or so folks sitting around drinking coffee and munching cookies, I felt very foolish at my preconceptions. I had always considered myself normal, and those people seemed normal, too! It also felt very comfortable to be in a room where everyone else was gay, and where I could let down at least a few defenses.

Whatever the meeting itself was about, I wasn't terribly impressed. There was much talk concerning politics, and liberation, and the bar in Chapel Hill, and I just wasn't interested in those things. (And, in a way, I'm still not. I'm too conscious of reactions in the straight world to even sign my name to this article. Even though I believe now that I should try to change myself and society, so that neither feels uptight about homosexuality, it all seemed somewhat useless then.)

The chairperson wanted to form a small consciousness-raising group of about eight gay men, and asked me to join. It turned out to be more personal than a simple discussion group, though less than a full-fledged sensitivity or growth group. A lot of good things happened. We shared thoughts about the meanings of being gay, about our relationships with parents and other gay men, and sometimes about general mind-sets and lifestyles. Often we just relaxed and socialized. We began treating each other as something other than potential bedmates, and became friends. And it has been these friendships from the consciousness raising group that justifies involvement in the DGA for me now.

So, although I still sometimes question the directions the Alliance may take, I stay mainly because there is the potential for friendship and support for each other in dealing with problems and celebrating the joys of being gay. This might not happen in any given DGA meeting, but it does happen among people in the group, whom I would not have met outside the Alliance. It has meant much to me, and I hope it can mean as much to others.

--W.M

***

U.N.C. RECOGNIZES GAY ASSOCIATION

Chapel Hill, known to all as one of the most atypical small towns in North Carolina, is now odder than ever: for it is now the home of a state university that has just fully recognized a campus gay group as a bona-fide campus organization, The Carolina Gay Association. (Several Southern state universities have previously been
not at all receptive to the idea of a campus gay organization; others, Georgia State among them, have.) Chapel Hill (not Durham), containing probably the largest percentage of gays in North Carolina was caught bringing up the cow's tail, in the sense that Duke has had a functioning gay group for over a year now.

The Carolina Gay Association, prior to official recognition, was known simply as the Gay Awareness Rap Group. This group was organized in February, 1974; weekly meetings of twenty to thirty members were first held in the Newman Center on Pittsboro Street and later moved to the Lutheran Student Center because of the greater creature comforts offered there: coffee to drink and chairs to sit on. Consciousness-raising was the main activity for the Winter and Spring. During the Summer months, attendance declined for two reasons: people left town or were bored with the work of the group, i.e., drafting a constitution and preparing an application to be submitted to the University's Office of Student Affairs and Dean Boulton (of Winston Dorm fame) for recognition as a campus organization. By the end of July, a constitution had been agreed upon, and four (straight) faculty members found to serve as advisors. The application was submitted on July 29. The group stewed out the month of August, planning strategies in the event of acceptance or rejection. But only two questions were asked by the Dean's secretary: "Did we have a treasurer? Why not?" "No money," was the reply. "Had the constitution been ratified?" "Yes, on July 15 and 22," was the reply. On Friday, September 6, the formal decision was made and a letter sent to the Chairperson of the group informing him of the acceptance of the application and hence recognition of the group as the Carolina Gay Association. The Daily Tar Heel ran a heavily-edited front page article on Tuesday, September 10, with the headline "Gays Recognized by Dean Boulton"; on Friday, September 13, another article appeared discussing possible problems of funding the group by Student Government. (Such a possibility definitely exists, considering the conservative nature of the average UNC politico.) Further publicity was and is provided on WDBS in Durham.

Purposes and goals of the GAC will include consciousness-raising for gays and straights alike, serving as an alternative to the traditional meeting-places of gay people (i.e., bars and tea-rooms), establishment of a resource library of books, films and AV materials on homosexuality, as well as a speaker program, sponsorship of coffee houses and gay dances, and action to eliminate discrimination against gays in society at large and in the University Community in particular. Attendance is open to all regardless of race, sex, creed, national origin, and sexual preference. Officers, however, must be students at UNC.

The organization will be set up on an "umbrella plan"; general meetings will plan and co-ordinate the activities of committees for social action, publicity, social activities, etc. Membership in the various committees is open to all, depending upon personal interests. Attendance at the General Meetings is open to all interested persons.

The first General Meeting was held Monday, September 16 at 7:30 PM in the Green Room of Graige Dorm on the UNC South Campus. The next meeting will be on September 30, same time and place. For further information call Chapel Hill 929-3123. Come on out.

--John Fox
GAYS AND BUSINESS: MA BELL COMES OUT

American Telephone and Telegraph Co. announced last summer an explicit policy barring discrimination against homosexuals in hiring, promotion and dismissal by the parent company and its subsidiaries. AT&T, or "Ma Bell," is the country's largest private employer, with over one million employees. The new policy was stated in AT&T News, a company publication: "An individual's sexual preference isn't a criterion either for becoming an employee or remaining an employee of the Bell System. Job retention and promotability are based on demonstrable job performance and behavior. An individual's sexual tendencies or preferences are strictly personal and information about these matters shouldn't be sought out by company personnel."

The Wall Street Journal, which reported the story on August 8, quoted a company spokesman as saying that it would be "perfectly okay" for an employee to be openly active in a gay rights organizations.

The policy change is expected to have an immediate effect on Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Co., which has been the target of protests by gay organizations. The San Francisco based affiliate of Ma Bell previously had a policy of not hiring "militantly gay" people. "Militantly gay" often seemed to include anyone known to be a member of a gay group.

Another subsidiary, Northwestern Bell Telephone Co., had refused to hire a homosexual as recently as last year. However, the city of Minneapolis, where Northwestern Bell operates, passed an ordinance last March prohibiting job discrimination against gays. The company promised compliance with the ordinance.

Although AT&T's statement is the most explicit one to date by a major American corporation, the Wall Street Journal reported in July that other companies were quietly changing their policies. In a feature article by staff reporter Mike Tharp, the Journal said that "a growing number of companies have quietly indicated that as long as an employee does the job, sexual preference is a private, not a corporate, concern."

An example is Honeywell, Inc., a large manufacturer of business machines. In 1970, a vice-president of the company stated in a letter that "we wouldn't have a known homosexual." But a company spokesman now says that that policy has been changed.

Corporations have also begun to show a sensitivity to gay issues in areas other than employment. A scheduled episode of "Marcus Welby M.D." has drawn fire from the National Gay Task Force in New York for being anti-gay. The American Federation of Teachers and the American Psychiatric Association have also joined the protest. As a result, Warner Lambert Co., one of the show's sponsors, withdrew its advertising. The ABC Network was reported to be "shaken" by the move. At the present time, there is some doubt as to whether the episode will be aired at all.

The reasons for these changing policies are not difficult to discern. A company which arbitrarily refuses to hire homosexuals is depriving itself of potentially valuable employees for reasons which have nothing to do with job performance or ability. Similarly, a company which sponsors programs that insult gays is likely to alienate large numbers of potential customers. In short, discrimina-
WAITING

My distress is that I cannot make him choose me. I don't know how.
He seems complete without me. I do not see how one thing I have can be
of use to him. I pass through my days now disturbed by his presence,
by the cheerful song he makes about him,
that encounters my more somber chord
with unexpected harmony. I measure time
by meetings with him, though quietly,
for he seems a far off possibility,
barolo more. Often I am greedy for more
immediate, sensual men, whose nearness
excites me. Yet it is clear they are mythical,
but he is real. I cannot penetrate that
feeling he gives me when I am close to him,
as of complex storms in the self,
my very being as a person at question
in his eyes. I would be simply real.
The tears well up here in my literal eyes,
for I know that I would rearrange
the world to bring the blessing of love
on our friendship. He holds a lever
to my soul. Am I a passerby in his design,
or he a passerby in mine?

26 January 1974

--Adon Field

(Copyright 1974 by Adon Field. Reprinted with permission.)
MISCELLANY: SAPPHO IN ACADEME

The grapevine is almost always right --though for a variety of reasons, scholars (who prefer to invent their own myths) do not always listen to what the grapevine has to say. About Sappho, the ancient world could believe many things at once: that she was a wife, mother, political factionary, lover, incomparable poet, and lesbian; philologists can believe only one thing at a time, and that is not always the truth.

As early as the first century B.C. there was learned debate whether or not Sappho had been--of all things--a prostitute; and by the second century A.D., scholars were busy trying to distinguish two Sapphoses: one, the sublime poet whom Plato had called "the Tenth Muse", the other, a sex-crazed courtesan to whom the salacious stories, such as they were, must refer. An attempt to spiritualize Sappho's loves, and see in them a paradigm of supramundane passion, appears as early as the reign of the emperor Claudius (A.D. 41-54), in a smallish underground basilica constructed at obvious expense for the discreet gatherings of one of the neo-Pythagorean sects then popular in Rome, despite official opposition: there, high in the half-dome of the apse, just in the spot a later age would have reserved for the Mother of God or Christ as Pankrator, Sappho appears in an exquisite stucco relief about to cast herself from a cliff into the waiting arms of a sea-god; legend being that aging Sappho, spurned by the youth Phaon, drowned herself for love off the coast of Leucas. In the context of the other decorations in the basilica, we can only conclude that for our suburban mystics, Sappho's suicide represented the leap of the soul inflamed by the love of God, a figure for the final turn of the wheel of rebirth: reunion with the Divine.

In the somewhat earlier burlesque of the Phaon theme attributed to Ovid (Heroides XV), Sappho complains bitterly that if Phaon cannot love her for herself, he might at least have some regard for her literary reputation. The Church did neither --and whether the Sapphic collection was destroyed in A.D. 380 at the instigation of St. Gregory of Nyssa, or as late as 1073, all that survived until the late 19th century was the text of two poems, one of them quoted incompletely, and a scattering of fragments--some hardly more than a word or two--embedded in the commentaries of essayists and lexicographers.

Of the preserved poems, one (Fr. 1) is, I believe, a charmingly somewhat teasingly ironic prayer to Aphrodite to help Sappho, as she has done in times past, to mend a quarrel with a young friend; the other (Fr. 31) is a remarkable description of the physical effects of the jealous longing Sappho experiences on seeing a protogoe in the company of a young man: tremor, clouded vision, impaired speech, sudden perspiration. The hope that more extensive remains might turn up among the mummy-wrappings of Egypt has been largely unfulfilled: out of an original collection of at least several thousand lines, we have no more than several dozen.

The question of Sappho's morality might have rested with the Church's condemnation and the Renaissance tendency to read the Ovidian piece as a serious essay in biography, but for a controversy known as the "Battle
of the Books" that raged in the 16th and 17th centuries over the relative merits of ancient and modern literature. Some argued the superior taste and refinement of contemporary writing; others, the nobility of the ancients. Anne LeFevre (Mme. Dacier), daughter of a classicist at the University of Saumur, who had learned her Greek while doing embroidery in the room where her father tutored her slow-witted brother, sought to defend the manners of Greece against those who, for example, criticized Homer's Princess Nausikaa for deigning to wash her brother's laundry; Nausikaa was better employed, retorted Mme. Dacier, than in wasting her time playing cards and gossiping. It was only natural that, as a controversialist, Mme. Dacier should attempt to refute any more serious charges against ancient morality, and so in her edition of Sappho published in 1681 at the precocious age of 28, she fired what may be considered the opening salvo in the modern battle over Sappho's virtue, with a defense based less on evidence than on biased notions of probability: Sappho's townsmen, for example, would have been unlikely to use her portrait on their coinage if she had been a lesbian, nor would she have disappeared—as we are told she did—as her brother's alleged liaison with a prostitute. "Such a pretty girl as you are," said Christina to Sweden to the young scholar, "are you not ashamed to be so learned?"

The "modernist" Pierre Bayle, in his 1695 Dictionnaire historique et critique is even more magisterially ironic (I quote the 1734-38 translation of Des Maizeaux): "You must know that (Sappho's) amorous passion extended even to the persons of her own sex...I cannot blame the charity of Mrs. LeFevre, who has endeavoured, for the honour of Sappho, to render the fact uncertain; but I think her too reasonable to be angry with us for believing our own eyes. The ode which Longinus has mentioned, is not in the style of one female friend writing to another: it savours of love all over, and not of friendship: otherwise, Longinus, who was so good a judge, would not have brought it as a model of the art with which great masters represent things: he would not, I say, have given us as an example of that art, the manner whereby the symptoms of an amorous fury are collected in that ode...and Plutarch would not have cited this same ode to prove that love is a divine fury, which causes more violent entusiasmms than those of the priestess of Delphos or the Bacchantes, and of the priestess of Cybolo...If her design was to dispense with the other half of mankind, she was frustrated of her expectation; for she fell desperately in love with Phaon, and did in vain all that she could to make him love her: but he despised her and forced her by his coldness to throw herself headlong from a rock, to extinguish her devouring flame. How cruel he was!"

Bayle's rationalist attitude held the field during the 18th century, though his "delicately frivolous" treatment of the Phaenostylos story did not impede its growing popularity as a theme for paintings and over a dozen plays and operas dating from the later 18th well into the 19th centuries. The latter are seldom performed nowadays, though I do recall listening over a defective head-set, one gin-soaked night on Central Park West, to a tape pirated from the Teatro San Carlo in Naples, in which, I was assured, a Turkish soprano was
performing the stirring leap-scene from a Sappho & Phaon by, appropriately, Martini—or was it Pacini?—the memory is blurred.

The Austrian playwright Grillparzer's Sappho (1814) deserves a certain minor notoriety for perhaps the single most uncharacteristic line ever put in her mouth: "Pfui doch, der argen, schlechtgestimmten Liebe!" replies Sappho to Phaon's starstruck praises of her poetic skill: "Phoocy already on the ill-tuned lyre!" Apparently Charles Gounod's Sappho et Phaon (1851), his first opera, was withdrawn after only six performances; despite some rather lovely bits on the musical side, the book left something to be desired: at one point the chorus goes on for some six pages with "The entrails of the victims announce to us that the gods are favorable. Be sublime, poets, for your songs are heard in heaven!"

As the baroque age shrank from the primitive, so the romantics idealized it. The tendency to impute symbolic qualities to a purified Sappho reappears: for Byron, she typifies Greek freedom; for Leopardi, artistic solitude; and for literary coteries she becomes the model blue-stocking (though in a description of George Sand as "Sappho revived" there is perhaps more moral truth than artistic symbolism). Among scholars, F. G. Welcker of Göttingen, attempted to rehabilitate Sappho's reputation in his Sappho Free from a Prevailing Bias (1816), by substituting several of his own. Since, he maintains, homosexuality was regarded by the ancients as unnatural, any irregularity in Sappho's behavior would have been mentioned long before the first appearance of such a charge, in a 10th-century Byzantine lexicon. (As it happens, earlier Greek writers rarely mention Sappho's sexuality, any more than they do that of Sophocles or Plato, for the simple reason that sexual behavior was seldom in itself enough to arouse comment unless it was combined with some other eccentricity of personality, appearance, or behavior. The comic poets, understandably, find more hilarity in inventing romantic entanglements between Sappho and other lyric poets—male homosexuals, in particular—than in casting aspersions on Sappho's lesbian tastes. Those references to Sappho's homosexuality in Roman writers of the first century B.C. and later, Welcker is forced to misconstrue, to avoid the plain meaning of the words.) With an equally myopic view of literary biography, Welcker advances the further proposition that Sappho's exquisite poetry cannot have been written by a lesbian since homosexuality of necessity hardens the mind, depriving it of the nobler emotions.

One of Welcker's most outspoken critics reminds us that in scholarship, as in life itself, one piece of foolishness often leads to another. Col. William Muro, Rector of the University of Edinburgh and author of a Critical History of the Language and Literature of Ancient Greece (1854), believed that love is a debased and unworthy theme for poetry; thus, Homeric epic is superior to Lyric because of the subordinate role in it of erotic interest: "A ready subjection to the fascinations of the inferior order of their species can hardly be a solid basis of renown for kings or heroes"; and he denounced Sappho for the immorality he chose to find in the texts themselves. (Another Colonel, Emily Dickinson's mentor T. W. Higginson, points out in an essay in the Atlantic for 1871 that "Such a critic could hardly be expected to
look with favor upon one who not only chose an inferior order of themes, but had the temerity to belong to an inferior order herself." For Higginson, Sappho is the prototype of the reformer Margaret Fuller, and an inspiration for the women's rights movement: "Modern nations must take up...where...Lesbos only pointed the way...The aspirations of modern life culminate, like the greatest of modern poems, in the elevation of womanhood. 'Die ewige Weibliche zieht uns hinan.'"

But the tide of idealism was already beginning to recede: a new and distinctly lurid era in the figure of Sappho had already been inaugurated, however inadvertently, with the publication in 1857 of Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil*. "Mael" Sappho's Lesbos becomes a sink of howling vice (II.4: "Inebriate each night with cries of torment raising up to heaven her desert shores"); and in two other poems, "Femmes damnées", Baudelaire makes use of lesbian love to typify the ultimate sterility of lust, whether indulged (II.5: "Across the deserts flee like wolves; Fulfill your destiny, disordered souls, And flee the infinite you carry deep within!") or sublimated (II.6: "Poor sisters, I love you and yet pity you For your despairing griefs, your thirsts unquenchable, The urns of love with which your hearts are full.")

Despite Baudelaire's attitude of condemnation, these and several other poems were officially suppressed, and popular imagination be exposed to areas best left concealed, and the author was fined both for publishing and for writing them. Although the legal ban was not lifted until 1919, the "condemned poems" continued to circulate; and contrary to the fears of the authorities, they tended not so much to subvert the precarious morality of a restive proletariat as to inflame the imagination of a suggestible intelligentsia.

Within several years, Baudelaire's friend Gustave Courbet had painted his notorious "Sloth and Lewdness" (later renamed simply "Sleep"), in which two voluptuous young women lie together exhausted by the excess of their passion. (One of the models was Whistler's Mother's son's mistress; the relationship, between the latter two, was ended shortly thereafter.) Academic painters and sculptors, whose "Classical" themes made suggestive nudity intellectually defensible to a prurient bourgeoisie, turned more and more to "Sapphic" subjects. One James Pradier, whose women were regarded as pressing the limits of an "honest decency", sculpted some half-dozen representations of Sappho and her friends, most of them conventional save one, "of two girls in the very act", described by Swinburne in a letter of lip-smacking delight ending: "It was the sculptor's last work before he left this world of vulgar copulation for the Lesbian Hades. May we be found as fit to depart --and may our last works be like his" (1869). --And, of course, Sappho is the model for Swinburne's own Lesbia Brandon.

Among critics, J. A. Symonds was influential in forming the fin-de-siecle mentality generally and its picture of Sappho in particular. His recently-published correspondence reveals, at least more circumstantially than his nympholeptic poetry, the dimensions of his tortured personal concern with homosexuality; and in *Studies of the Greek Poets* (1873), he writes with a moral earnestness tinged with morbidity: "Nowhere in any age of Greek history, or in any part of Hellas did the love of physical beauty, the sensibility to radiant scenes..."
of nature, the consuming fervor of personal feeling, assume such grand proportions and receive so illustrious an expression as they did in Lesbos. At first this passion blossomed into the most exquisite lyrical poetry the world has known... But the fruit it bore was bitter and rotten. Lesbos became a byword for corruption. The passions which for a moment had flamed into the gorgeousness of Art, burning their envelope of words and images, remained a mere furnace of sexuality, from which no expression of the divine in human life could be expected." The question of Sappho's sexuality he leaves open, as unknowable. (Not many years earlier, when he was still attempting to deny the nature of his own desires, Symonds had been instrumental in forcing the resignation of the headmaster of Harrow on hearsay evidence of corrupting students.)

In France of the 80's and 90's, the Symbolist reaction to the restraints of the Third Republic—fed by a misreading of Baudelaire—leads, along with much else, to a self-consciously decadent cultivation of Sappho and lesbianism in art: Sappho casting her lyre into the sea before her leap (the futility of art as consolation), Sappho drifting cold and green at the bottom of the sea, girls entwined in carnel embrace on the shore of the sea, masculine women seated in elegiac solitude at cafe tables (doubtless in the Rat Mort, a contemporary lesbian restaurant on the Place Pigalle)... the reader may view them for himself in Phillippe Junot's The Symbolists.

By 1884, the title alone of Daudet's novel Sappho was enough to evoke the bohemian demi-monde of Paris; and in poetry, the period reaches its perhaps inevitable culmination in The Songs of Bilitis, issued in 1895 by Pierre Louyss, dedicated to Andre Gide. The volume purported to be a French translation of a scholarly edition by G. Heim of a series of poetic inscriptions in Greek found in a tomb at Paleo-Limesso, and included three epitaphs from the tomb of the "authores and a pseudo-scholarly biographical sketch. A half-Greek born in Asia Minor early in the sixth century, Bilitis abandoned her illegitimate child to journey to Lesbos, where she was for a time Sappho's lover; then, for some ten years, she lived with Nasisidika (a name actually mentioned in a fragment of Sappho), before migrating alone to Cyprus, where she ended her life as a courtesan. The 143 songs, excluding a number "not translated" (on the apparent ruse that they were too direct for modern readers) are sometimes lovely evocations of the Greek pastoral, sometimes pale imitations of known lyrics, sometimes merely ludicrous fantasies, as in #146, on Sappho: "She sleeps... She is certainly beautiful, although her hair is cut like that of an athlete. But this astonishing countenance, this virile breast, and these narrow hips... I would like to go before she awakens. Alas! I am against the wall. I must step over her. I am afraid lest I touch her hips and that she will take me as I pass."

In time, Louyss' poems would inspire the name for a pioneer gay women's organization, The Daughters of Bilitis; a more immediate result was an extended review in the Göttinger Gelehrte Anzeigen by Prof. Ulrich Willa-owitz-Moellendorf, later of Berlin, and—for better and worse—possibly the most learned and influential Hellonian of modern times. This essay in
consummate pedantry, reprinted in his 
Sappho und Simonides (1913; dedicated 
to Welcker), attacks Louys on two 
fronts: his defective re-creation of 
the archaic Greek literary and psy-
chological character, and his picture 
of Sappho as an active homosexual. 
Though Wilamowitz grants that there 
is a certain learned quality in 
Louys' work, and even occasional 
beauty of imagery, the whole is vi-
tilated by anachronisms of language, 
poetic form, religious feeling—even 
feeling for landscape. This first 
part of Wilamowitz's attack is 
marrered by astonishing touches of 
anti-Semitism directed at Louys: 
butilis does not, as Wilamowitz 
suggests, so much represent Louys' 
semitic racial bias as she does the 
orientalizing taste of the period, 
just as Louys' Sappho has elements 
of the "belle dame sense merci" 
figure created by the Decadents 
(with the help of John Keats and 
Mario Praz), represented in such 
imperious, devouring females as 
Astarte, Herodias, Salammbo, Salome, 
and all that crowd. 

Wilamowitz's second section, de-
vented to homosexuality in antiquity, 
is more realistic than Welcker's 
account, but marred by a similarly 
exaggerated regard for the nobility 
of woman that at once gives sanction 
to heterosexual cravings and keeps 
women in their place. While W. is 
perfectly capable of elsewhere 
inventing the most extraordinary 
complications in the love-life of 
the homosexual poet Callimachus, and 
is here tolerant of irregularities 
in the sonnets of Shakespeare and 
Michelangelo, he, too, insists that 
a sensitive woman cannot be a les-
bian and a great poet at the same 
time. He does not even spare us yet 
another coyly ponderous reference to 
Goethe's tag—though he might rather 
have paraphrased it simply, "Die 

cwigo Weibliche zicht Sappho an."

Despite his posture of dis-
passion ("If it were true that 
Sappho was a tribade, I would be 
the last to gloze over the fact 
or veil it in spurious language") 
W. goes so far as to omit from 
his translation of Sappho's ode 
describing her jealous seizure 
(Fr. 31) the line "Sweat pours 
down my body..."; for he argues 
that the poem is not an expres-
son of emotional pathology but a 
wedding-song written to be per-
formed at the celebration itself, 
in which Sappho speaks as a 
schoolmistress regretful at los-
ing her young charge to the 
groom.

Even so, Wilamowitz's instincts 
for poetic and linguistic possi-
bility would never have allowed 
him to indulge in the bizarre 
excesses of an Algerian scholar, 
J.-M.-P. Basco턱, who in 1913 at-
tempted to show that Fragment 31 
was neither a marriage hymn nor 
an expression of unnatural pas-
sion: by means of the most 
eccentric textual and lexical 
manipulations, and by offering as 
its missing conclusion a farrago 
drawn from several unrelated 
fragments, Basco턱 interprets 
the ode as a diatribe against 
Stesichorus, whose poetry has be-
mused a former student of Sappho; 
it is the sight of the girl lis-
tening raptly to her rival's 
recitations that causes Sappho 
to break out in a sweat. Further 
in order to establish once for 
all Sappho's chastity, Basco턱 
tried to demonstrate that the 
names of proteges found in frag-
ments attributed to Sappho are 
merely the inventions and inter-
polations of scholars. If only 
there were the slightest hint 
that Basco턱's monograph was a
hoax, it would be perhaps the most brilliant parody of scholarship in the history of literature. Sadly, there is not; his method represents an aberration even in Classical Studies, and his ideas were not even thought worthy of refutation, save by two German periodicals.

Scholars generally tended to accept the authority of Wilamowitz, especially in Germany, where the notion of Sappho as the leader of a sort of religious sodality with overtones of the finishing-school gained a number of adherents; in the 1929 edition of the standard history of Greek literature, that of W. Schmidt and O. Stählin, one finds a whole list (drawn out of thin air) of the subjects Sappho taught her students: not only poetry and composition, musical and choral performance, but also deportment, the use of cosmetics, and even preparations for marriage. In America, Sappho becomes an emancipated clubwoman, too busy to be bad. So, at least, the distinguished archaeologist D. M. Robinson would have it (in Sappho and Her Influence, 1922): "What with her teaching, with her own writings, and with the executive work of the hetairial, those ancient Y.W.C.A.'s for the cultivation of poetry and music...she was too noble and too busy to be devoted to ignoble ways, falsely ascribed to her."

(Of Robinson's literary criticism, this example will suffice: "The telepathic and telegraphic sympathy of Sappho startles us and the wireless message sent by night across the severing sea, whose sigh you can hear in the original Greek, anticipates the modern radio.")

Still, the story of Sappho and Phaon lingers in the imagination of the would-be playwrights: in May 1922, Miss Bertha Barnett produced at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, an "interesting pageant" climaxing with Sappho's plunge into Lyman Lake; after a quick change, co-ed and quarterback were united "on Mt. Olympus". And at the University of Michigan, Percy Mackaye's 1907 tragedy Sappho and Phaon was produced by Mr. Harrison Grey Fiske with musical settings by one Professor Stanley of "Cath'tors, What Have We Forgot, Hymenaeon!", "What Shall We Do, Cythera?", and "Hollow Shell, Horny Shell," etc. W. A. Percy's long poem Sappho in Levkas (New Haven, 1915; author of Lanterns on the Levee, Memoirs of a Planter's Son) is less an interpretation of Sappho than a projection of the author's own yearnings (for a "brown shepherd boy"); and the moral fervor of H. W. Smyth of Harvard (Greek Melic Poets, 1899) suggests, though perhaps unintentionally, the sexual aesthetic of Oscar Wilde as much as it does that of Plato, Aristotle, or Sappho: "If the appreciation, by the same sex, of the beauty of man or woman demands the highest degree of purely artistic sensibility, Sappho's passion for her pupils is in one sense the keynote of her artistic nature."

But a generation brought up on Radclyffe Hall's, Mädchen in Uniform, and the sexual intrigues of the Bloomsbury Group could not hide its head forever, and in 1956, 267 years after Nino Dacier's initial white-wash, a scholar with generally unimpeachable credentials, Denys Page, Regius Professor of Greek at Cambridge University, re-opened the question of Sappho's sexuality (in his Sappho and Alcaeus) and concluded that while we have no evidence for assuming lesbian practice on the part of Sappho, the poems cannot be understood as other than an
an expression of homosexuality. He rejects the theory that lesbian love excludes the "finer emotions" and roundly denounces Wilamowitz's interpretation of Fragment 31: "There was never such a wedding-song in the history of society; and there never should have been such a theory in the history of scholarship...Sappho loves this girl with a passion of which the nature is no more disguised than the intensity."

Page may be unrealistic in maintaining that without explicit reference to sexual activity in the poetry, we cannot assume that Sappho's love was ever expressed physically (the "smoking gun" theory, so to speak, of sexual guilt); it is a standard that would certainly result in a false picture if applied to the majority of Western poets. Nevertheless, his general assessment is sane and fair, and is based, as far as it goes, on common-sense, not a contemporary theory.

Now scholarship, like nature, abhors a vacuum; although the void nature would fill, scholarship tends often to magnify. So at last, with the vogue triumphant for "bi-sexuality", psychoanalysis, and women's lib, Sappho has become a confused school-marm beset by penis-envy and male chauvinism. A. R. Burn of Glasgow lends the weight of his authority to the dubious translations of Willia Barnstone (1965) in terms reminiscent of The Children's Hour: "Love of older people for those younger of either sex, which is essential for a good teacher, normally has a sexual element, though that may be fiercely denied, and also certainly is not the whole story; for instance, there is also a protective (parental) feeling, akin to that which any normal man will have for a small bird or kitten."

G. Devereaux (1970) argues that in Fr. 31 Sappho is describing an anxiety attack of a sort that could only be produced in an active lesbian suffering from an intense castration complex and phallic awe. And on the heels of Sappho Was a Right-On Woman, Mary Lefkowitz, chairperson of the Women's Caucus of the American Philological Association, arguing in the face of all that we can properly deduce about Lesbian society and Sappho herself, and interpolating irrelevant constructs of her own, interprets Fr. 31 as a portrait of a woman bereft by a sexist world of all the normal means of communicating her feelings save the "weapons of the oppressed, patience and miracles" (1973).

The dialectic of scholarship being what it is, we can expect a new spate of antithetical argumentation; already, the theory that Sappho was a priestess of a religious association is being revived. But before we are all off and running again, M. L. West's view of Sappho's homosexuality is worth quoting (1970): "Sex was for her the private expression of a total romantic love that had its place in the context of semi-public and public gaiety and song. In this gaiety and song lay her abiding happiness." Or we might even listen to the human voice of Sappho herself speaking with the authority of self-knowledge: "I love whatever is graceful; and so it is through love that I perceive even the brightness of the sun, and what I should hold fair." Or we might at least heed the words of Seneca written nearly two millennia since the point at which we began our survey: "The grammarian Didymus wrote 4,000 books. I
would pity anyone who has to read so many supremely empty works. Among his books he enquires about the birthplace of Homer, the real mother of Aeneas, whether Anacreon was more of a lecher than a drunkard, whether Sappho was a prostitute, and other things which you ought to forget if you knew them. And then people complain that life is short..."

"Lord Keynes"

--C. Stillman

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *