

Sappho's Rose-Fingered Moon and Traditional Referentiality

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SAPPHO in fr.96 Voigt compares a departed friend to a moon among stars (6–9a):¹

νῦν δὲ Λύδαισιν ἐμπρέπεται γυναι-
κεσσὶν ὡς ποτ' ἀελίῳ
δύντος ἂ βροδοδάκτυλος σελάννα
πάντα περ<ρ>έχοισ' ἄστρα·

Now she stands out among Lydian women like the rose-fingered moon after sunset, surpassing all the stars.²

Such astral similes are a common element in encomiastic literature, especially in choral song;³ and they recur elsewhere in

¹ For the enumeration and presentation of Sappho fragments I follow C. Neri, *Saffo, Testimonianze e frammenti* (Berlin 2021); his text here follows the emendations of W. Schubart, “Neue Bruchstücke der Sappho und des Alkaios,” *SBBerl* 24 (1902) 195–209, at 200: in particular, σελάννα restores the required meter for the papyrus' μήνα. For discussion of the text see Neri 736, with further bibliography.

² Translations of Sappho are drawn or adapted from D. A. Campbell, *Greek Lyric I* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1982); all other translations are my own.

³ Cf. Bacchyl. 9.27–36; ithyphallic hymn for Demetrius Poliorcetes lines 9–12 (Powell, *Coll.Alex.* 174); R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book I* (Oxford 1970) 163–164, on *Carm.* 1.12.48. Choral song: K. ní Mheallaigh, *The Moon in the Greek and Roman Imagination: Myth, Literature, Science and Philosophy* (Cambridge 2020) 21–22; cf. A. Lardiniis, “Who Sang Sappho's Songs?” in E. Greene (ed.), *Reading Sappho: Contemporary Approaches* (Berkeley 1996) 150–172, at 161–164. For the larger significance of such moonlight comparisons see H. Sichtermann, “Das Mondlicht als Vergleich in der Kunstbetrachtung,” *Gymnasium* 86 (1979) 505–536.

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Sappho's surviving corpus, evoking a shared female world of song and dance.⁴ What is particularly striking about this instantiation of the motif is the description of the moon as βροδοδάκτυλος, “rose-fingered”—an epithet that is usually restricted to Dawn in archaic poetry.⁵ This apparent incongruity has prompted much perplexity among scholars, with various attempts to explain the adjective's significance.⁶ Some have even attempted to emend the word: in 2002 Clifford Hindley proposed ἀργυροδάκτυλος σελάννα (“silver-fingered moon”), and in 2020 Kyriakos Tsantsanoglou suggested βροδοδακτύλιμα μήνα (“rosy-ringed moon”).⁷ These proposals have been rightly criticized,⁸ but they evidence an ongoing uneasiness about the precise meaning of the epithet in Sappho's poem.

In this article, I would like to reassess the significance of Sappho's βροδοδάκτυλος. First (§1), I will highlight the adjective's

⁴ Cf. fr.34 (the moon outshines the stars) and fr.104(b) (Hesperus is “the most beautiful of all the stars”). For Sappho's adaptation of epic astral similes see N. Le Meur-Weissman, “Comment l'éclat d'Homère se reflète chez Sappho,” *Gaia* 10 (2006) 189–201, at 197; ní Mheallaigh, *The Moon* 22–23.

⁵ Throughout, I translate ῥοδοδάκτυλος as “rose-fingered” (rather than “rosy-fingered”) to foreground the epithet's association with the flower, rather than with color; cf. M. E. Irwin, “The Crocus and the Rose: A Study of the Interrelationship between the Natural and Divine World in Early Greek Poetry,” in D. E. Gerber (ed.), *Greek Poetry and Philosophy: Studies in Honour of Leonard Woodbury* (Chico 1984) 147–168, at 165–167. On the association with Dawn see §2 below.

⁶ For helpful overviews see e.g. R. Renehan, “The Early Greek Poets: Some Interpretations,” *HSCP* 87 (1983) 1–29, at 15–20; E. Tzamali, *Syntax und Stil bei Sappho* (Dettelbach 1996) 337–339.

⁷ C. Hindley, “Sappho's ‘Rosy’ Moon,” *CQ* 52 (2002) 374–377; K. Tsantsanoglou, “The ‘Cycle’ of Arignota. Sappho's fr. 95 and 96 V.,” *Trends in Classics* 12 (2020) 203–227, at 216–217. Tsantsanoglou's suggestion was pre-empted by A. J. Beattie, *JHS* 77 (1957) 320 (βροδοδακτύλιμα μήνα).

⁸ D. Hullinger, “Once in a Pink Moon (Sappho 96.8 LP),” *AClass* 63 (2020) 213–217; his arguments complement my own. Jenkyns' criticism of Beattie's proposal applies equally to Tsantsanoglou's: R. Jenkyns, *Three Classical Poets: Sappho, Catullus, and Juvenal* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1982) 68.

thematic relevance, outlining its connections with the internal logic of Sappho's poem and its broader associations with eroticism and beauty. Second (§2), I will explore the underappreciated significance of its traditional resonance within the epic tradition: the epithet aligns Selene and "rose-fingered" Dawn as goddesses who each had to suffer the sorrows of love in their relationships with mortal lovers. Combined, these interpretations offer further support for the transmitted adjective; in addition, I hope that they will improve our understanding of both fr.96 and Sappho's allusive artistry more widely.

1. *Sappho's rose-fingered moon in context*

Sappho's use of βροδοδάκτυλος can be adequately defended when viewed in the larger context of the poem in which it appears, as well as in the context of Sappho's wider corpus.

For a start, the "rose-fingered" nature of the moon fits with its wider action within fr.96. In particular, the distinctive description of the moon prepares for the imagery that immediately follows (9b–14):

φάος δ' ἐπί-
σχει θάλασσαν ἐπ' ἄλμύραν
ἴσως καὶ πολυανθέμοις ἀρούραις·
ἀ δ' (ἐ)έρσα κάλα κέχυται, τεθά-
λαισι δὲ βρόδα κάπαλ' ἄν-
θρυσκα καὶ μελίλωτος ἀνθεμώδης·

and its light spreads alike over the salt sea and the *flowery* fields; the dew is shed in beauty, and *roses* bloom and tender chervil and *flowery* melilot.

As Gregory Hutchinson has shown, there is a careful development of thought through these verses: in 13, roses are the first plant mentioned among those produced by the moon's dew, while βροδοδάκτυλος occupies the same metrical placement as πολυανθέμοις in the following stanza (11), an adjective which is itself echoed by ἀνθεμώδης (14).⁹ There is a natural progression

⁹ G. O. Hutchinson, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Oxford 2001) 181. Cf. A. P. Burnett,

from the “rose-fingered” moon to the “flowery” fields where its light reaches, and then to the “roses” and other “flowery” plants that bloom from the moonlit dew.¹⁰ The epithet βροδοδάκτυλος plays a key role in the internal logic of Sappho’s verses, inaugurating a tightly packed nexus of imagery which ties the moon to its effect on the world.

More generally, roses are a common feature of Sappho’s poetic world.¹¹ Besides fr.96, they appear in the famous *locus amoenus* of fr.2 (“the whole place is shadowed by roses,” βρόδοισι δὲ παῖς ὁ χῶρος / ἐσκίαστ’, 6–7), in Sappho’s association of song and immortality (her unnamed addressee has no share in the “roses of Pieria,” βρόδων / τῶν ἐκ Πιερίας, fr.55.2–3), in the fond reminiscences of fr.94 (featuring “wreathes of violets and roses,” στεφάνοις ἴων / καὶ βρ[όδων, 12–13), and in another extremely fragmentary poem (]βροδο[, fr.74(a).4). In fact, they were such an integral feature of Sappho’s poetry that Meleager chose the flower to symbolize her poems in his *Garland* (Σαπφοῦς βαιὰ μὲν, ἀλλὰ ῥόδα, *Anth.Pal.* 4.1.6).

Most significantly, however, Sappho’s descriptions of the rose frequently exhibit a particular association with love and desire.¹² In fr.94, the poet pictures her addressee wearing the garland of flowers around her “tender neck” (ἀ]πάλαι δέραι, 16) in a scene

Three Archaic Poets: Archilochus, Alcaeus, Sappho (London 1983) 307 n.81; D. D. Boedeker, *Descent from Heaven: Images of Dew in Greek Poetry and Religion* (Chico 1984) 58–60; B. C. MacLachlan, “Personal Poetry,” in D. E. Gerber (ed.), *A Companion to the Greek Lyric Poets* (Leiden) 133–220, at 180.

¹⁰ For the moon’s intimate association with dew, cf. Alcman fr.57 *PMGF*, where Dew (Ἐρσα) is the daughter of Zeus and Selene. On dew in ancient Greek thought generally see Boedeker, *Descent from Heaven*.

¹¹ See T. McEvilley, “Sapphic Imagery and Fragment 96,” *Hermes* 101 (1973) 257–278, at 265, for Sappho’s abundant use of flowers in her poetry, especially in comparison with other aspects of the natural world; cf. Irwin, in *Greek Poetry and Philosophy* 165.

¹² For the erotic nature of Sappho’s flower imagery see E. S. Stigers, “Retreat from the Male: Catullus 62 and Sappho’s Erotic Flowers,” *Ramus* 6 (1977) 83–102, at 90–98; R. Hague, “Sappho’s Consolation for Atthis, fr. 96 LP,” *AJP* 105 (1984) 29–36, at 31–32.

that continues with the fulfilment of desire on a soft bed (στρώμ[αν ἐ]πὶ μολθάκων / ἀπάλαν ... / ἐξίης πόθο[ν, 21–23),¹³ while in fr.2 the whole landscape is invested with a suggestively erotic allure, sealed by the invocation of Cypris, goddess of love (13–16).¹⁴ Such an association of roses with love and Aphrodite reflects a broader pattern of Greek thought,¹⁵ but it is particularly relevant for fr.96, a poem concerned with absence and desire: the departed woman in Lydia remembers Atthis “with longing” (ιμέρωι, 16). In this regard, the dewy flowers of fr.96 certainly gain their own erotic tinge: they echo both the blossoming flowers of fr.2 (τέθαλε / ... ἄνθεσιν, 9–10; cf. πολυανθέμοις, τεθάλαισι, ἀνθεμώδης, fr.96.11–14) and the “tender” eroticism of fr.94 (ἀπάλαι δέροι, 16; ἀπάλαν, 22; cf. κάπαλ’ ἄνθρυσκα, fr. 96.13–14). In addition, the outpouring of fertile dew which nourishes these plants recalls the mythical lovemaking of gods, which is elsewhere associated with generative dew and rain,¹⁶ while the moon simile itself may have an amatory resonance, since it is used elsewhere of “tender” Aphrodite.¹⁷ In such an

¹³ Cf. A. P. Burnett, “Desire and Memory (Sappho Frag. 94),” *CP* 74 (1979) 16–27, at 23–24.

¹⁴ See F. Budelmann, *Greek Lyric: A Selection* (Cambridge 2018) 121–126.

¹⁵ See Irwin, in *Greek Poetry and Philosophy* 161–164. Cf. e.g. Ibyc. fr.288.2–4 *PMGF*; Bacchyl. 17.113–116; Paus. 6.24.7. For the flower’s further association with softness and delicacy see M. E. Irwin, “Roses and the Bodies of Beautiful Women in Greek Poetry,” *EMC* 38 (1994) 1–13, at 6–8; and for its association with youth and beauty, Hullinger, *AClass* 63 (2020) 216.

¹⁶ Cf. *Il.* 14.347–351, the description of flowers that grew during the love-making of Zeus and Hera; note especially the shedding of dew (στιλπναί δ’ ἀπέπιπτον ἔερσαι, 351). Cf. Aesch. fr.44 *TrGF* on the union of Ouranos and Gaia, symbolised by fertile rain which falls from Heaven, bringing forth plants and trees; Sappho apparently treated this union in a lost poem (fr. 198a).

¹⁷ Cf. *Hom.Hymn.Aphr.* 89–90, ὡς δὲ σελήνη / στήθεσιν ἀμφ’ ἀπαλοῖσιν ἐλάμπετο. See A. Faulkner, *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (Oxford 2008) 170–171, who notes the parallel with Inanna, the Near Eastern goddess of love, who appears to her mortal lover Dumuzi “like a moon-beam” (*ETCSL*

erotically charged context, the “rose-fingered” moon finds a natural place, reinforcing the amatory flavor of Sappho’s poem.

In addition to this general erotic tone, we should also note the specific connection that the epithet ῥοδοδάκτυλος has with female beauty.¹⁸ Although the epithet was primarily associated with Dawn in early poetry (see §2), it could also be used of other women. Bacchylides uses it of Io (Ἰνάχου ῥοδοδάκτυλος κόρα, 19.18), while Colluthus later applies it to Aphrodite (ῥοδοδάκτυλος ... Κύπρις, *Rap.Hel.* 99), and Christodorus to Amymone (Ἀμυμώνη ῥοδοδάκτυλος, *Anth.Pal.* 2.61). Indeed, in an anecdote of a symposium dating to the mid-fifth century, Ion of Chios glosses the adjective as particularly appropriate to “the hands of a beautiful woman” (χειρᾶς ... γυναικὸς καλῆς, *BNJ* 392 F 6). The word fits into a larger category of female (and especially divine) epithets that are frequent in Sappho: compare the “rose-armed Graces” (βροδοπάχαιες ... Χάριτες, fr.53), “rose-armed Dawn” (βροδόπαχυν Αὔων, fr.58c.9), and “gold-sandalled Dawn” (χρυσοπέδιλος Αὔως, fr.123; cf. too fr.103.10). Combined with the definite article, the adjective thus encourages us to see the Moon in anthropomorphic terms, as a personified deity with the “rosy” fingers of a beautiful woman.¹⁹ Given such a nuance, the moon simile resonates even further with its surrounding context: “rose-fingered” Selene proves an apt parallel for the woman who has

4.08.29, <https://etcs1.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcs1.cgi?text=t.4.08.29#>, cf. *ANET*³ 639).

¹⁸ Cf. E. Heitsch, “Zum Sappho-Text,” *Hermes* 95 (1967) 385–392, at 392.

¹⁹ Personified Μῆνη, *Hom.Hymn* 32.1; Σελήνη, Hes. *Theog.* 371, *Hom.Hymn* 32.8, 17. Cf. ní Mheallaigh, *Moon* 28, on the haptic connotations of the Moon’s tangible “fingers.” Sappho’s use of the definite article certainly implies a personified “Moon.” She tends to use the article+attributive adjective only in conjunction with personal names, cf. E. Lobel, *ΑΚΑΙΟΓ ΜΕΛΗ: The Fragments of the Lyrical Poems of Alcaeus* (Oxford 1927) lxxxviii–lxxxix: e.g. fr.123 (ἄ χρυσοπέδιλος Αὔως), fr.133.2 (τὰν πολύολβον Ἀφροδίταν); cf. A. W. Gomme, “Interpretations of Some Poems of Alkaios and Sappho,” *JHS* 77 (1957) 255–266, at 265–266; D. Clay, “Fragmentum Adespotum 976,” *TAPA* 101 (1970) 119–129, at 123–125 with n.17.

gone to Lydia and exhibits a “tender heart” (λέπτων ... φρένα, fr.96.17).²⁰ In her beauty and personified state, the Moon is the ideal vehicle for Sappho’s simile.

Given the broader resonance of roses in Sappho’s corpus and the contextual significance of the epithet within fr.96, Sappho’s use of βροδοδάκτυλος is thus both appropriate and well-motivated.

2. Sappho’s traditional referentiality

One further argument to support βροδοδάκτυλος can be made by taking its association with the Homeric Dawn as an interpretative gain rather than a problematic nuisance. As is well known, the epithet ῥοδοδάκτυλος is intimately connected to Dawn. Before Sappho, we find the verse-end formula ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἥώς over twenty-five times in Homer, and once each in Hesiod (*Op.* 610) and Mimnermus (fr.12.3 West).²¹ On current evidence, Sappho is the first poet to apply the adjective differently; by using it of the moon, she establishes a close connection between Selene and Dawn. Scholars have suggested that she presents the Moon as “the dawn of the nocturnal day,” its beams serving as a foil and parallel for the rays of the sun.²² But I want to argue that the epithet also points to a further similarity between Dawn and Selene as mythical goddesses.

As Alexander Forte has shown, the Homeric epithet ῥοδο-

²⁰ On this simile and the similarities and differences between the Lydian woman and the moon, see C. W. Macleod, “Two Comparisons in Sappho,” *ZPE* 15 (1974) 217–220, at 219–220; C. Carey, “Sappho Fr.96 LP,” *CQ* 28 (1978) 366–371.

²¹ Cf. too Sappho’s own variant of this phrase, βροδόπαχυν Ἀΰων, fr.58c.9.

²² L. Weld and W. Nethercut, “Sappho’s Rose-Fingered Moon: A Note,” *Arion* 5 (1966) 28–31, at 31: the moon “plays a dual role ... as a partial substitute for the sun”; M. G. Bonanno, “Una pergamena insidiosa (P.Berol. 9722, fol. 5 = Sapph. 96 V.),” in G. Bastianini et al. (eds.), *I papiri di Saffo e di Alceo* (Florence 2007) 31–40, at 37: “l’aurora di un giorno notturno”; Hullinger, *AClass* 63 (2020) 215. Cf. Le Meur-Weissman, *Gaia* 10 (2006) 198–199, who notes an inversion of the traditional Homeric schema in which the Dawn is closely associated with the sun.

δάκτυλος appears systematically in contexts of desire and wish-fulfillment.²³ Given this resonance, alongside the erotic context of Sappho's fragment and its personification of the Moon, I suggest that Sappho re-uses the epithet to allude to the parallel love lives of Dawn and Selene. Both were famous for their affairs with mortals: the former with Tithonus, the latter with Endymion.

Both of these myths feature in Sappho. Dawn's relationship with Tithonus is the mythical exemplum at the heart of the recently reconstituted fr.58c,²⁴ while a scholion to Apollonius' *Argonautica* reports that Sappho treated the myth of Selene and Endymion: "The story goes that Selene comes down to this (Latmian) cave to meet Endymion. Sappho and Nicander in *Europeia* Book 2 tell the story of the love of Selene" (λέγεται δὲ κατέρχεσθαι εἰς τοῦτο τὸ ἄντρον (scil. τὸ Λάτμιον) τὴν Σελήνην πρὸς Ἐνδυμίωνα. περὶ δὲ τοῦ τῆς Σελήνης ἔρωτος ἱστοροῦσι Σαπφὼ καὶ Νίκανδρος ἐν δευτέρῳ Εὐρωπείας).²⁵ The Selene/Endymion myth also appears to be evoked in fr.168B, in which the speaker contrasts her own solitary sleep with the setting of the Moon (as she goes to join Endymion?).²⁶ Both myths form part of a larger

²³ A. S. W. Forte, "Reach and Reunion in the *Odyssey*: An Enactive Narratology," *Helios* 47 (2020) 1–38, at 14–22.

²⁴ See M. L. West, "The New Sappho," *ZPE* 151 (2005) 1–9; E. Greene et al. (eds.), *The New Sappho on Old Age: Textual and Philosophical Issues* (Washington 2009); R. Janko, "Tithonus, Eos and the Cicada in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* and Sappho fr. 58," in C. C. Tsagalis et al. (eds.), *The Winnowing Oar – New Perspectives in Homeric Studies* (Berlin 2017) 267–292; Neri, *Saffo* 667–673.

²⁵ Fr.199 = schol. Ap. Rhod. 4.57–58. Sappho may have drawn on local traditions from Asia Minor in her treatment of the myth: D. L. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (Oxford 1955) 273–274; E. Stehle, "Sappho's Gaze: Fantasies of a Goddess and Young Man," in E. Greene (ed.), *Reading Sappho: Contemporary Approaches* (Berkeley 1996) 193–225, at 194 n.5.

²⁶ Cf. Clay, *TAPA* 101 (1970) 125–126 (I do not doubt the ascription of this fragment to Sappho, see Clay's discussion; cf. too P. Reiner and D. Kovacs, "ΔΕΔΥΚΕ ΜΕΝ Α ΣΕΛΑΝΝΑ: The Pleiades in Mid-Heaven," *Mnemosyne* 46 (1993) 145–159, especially 155–159). Sappho's loneliness is reinforced by the

series of affairs between goddesses and mortal men which featured prominently in Sappho's poetry: we could compare the relationship of Aphrodite and Adonis, as well as that of Aphrodite and Phaon.²⁷ The goddesses' trysts proved a key and recurring mythological framework for Sappho; they served as both a foil and an analogue for her own situation.

By employing the epithet βροδοδάκτυλος of Selene in an erotically charged simile, I suggest that Sappho implicitly acknowledges the underlying parallel between the mythological love lives of these two celestial goddesses.²⁸ Twice in Homer, Dawn explicitly leaves the couch of Tithonus to bring light to the world (*Il.* 11.1–2 ≈ *Od.* 5.1–2):

Ἥως δ' ἐκ λεχέων παρ' ἀγαυοῦ Τιθωνοῖο
ὄρνυθ', ἴν' ἀθανάτοισι φῶος φέροι ἠδὲ βροτοῖσι(v).

Dawn rose from her bed beside lord Tithonus to bring light to immortals and mortals.

Similarly, as we have seen, Sappho's poem continues with the moon shedding light (φῶος, 9; cf. Homer's φῶος) over the whole world. Her universalizing polar expression "land and sea" (θάλασσαν ... καὶ ... ἀρούραις, 10–11) parallels and varies Homer's "gods and men" (ἀθανάτοισι ... ἠδὲ βροτοῖσι(v)), further constructing the Moon in Dawn's image. To be clear, I am not arguing that Sappho alludes directly to these Homeric verses, but rather that she is tapping into the Dawn's traditional associations in epic poetry and reapplying them to the Moon; as

chiastic arrangement of the first three lines (sg. σελάιννα – pl. Πληΐαδες – pl. νύκτες – sg. ὄρα), which syntactically isolates ἔγω δὲ μόνα in the fourth.

²⁷ See Stehle, in *Reading Sappho* 193–225; R. S. Scodel, "Myth in Sappho," in P. J. Finglass et al. (eds.), *Cambridge Companion to Sappho* (Cambridge 2021) 190–202, at 191. Adonis: fr.140a; cf. too fr.96.23 (with M. L. West, "Burning Sappho," *Gaia* 22 [1970] 307–330, at 328), 117B(b), 140b, 168, and Dioscorides *Anth.Pal.* 7.407. Phaon: fr.211.

²⁸ This parallel would be further reinforced if Tsantsanoglou is correct that fr.96 appeared in a song cycle with another poem that included explicit references to Dawn: *Trends in Classics* 12 (2020) 213–215.

Dawn leaves Tithonus to bring light to the world, so too does Selene leave Endymion.²⁹ In other words, the goddesses are typological doublets of each other, one accompanying the day, the other the night.

Such rewiring of traditional epithets can be paralleled elsewhere in archaic Greek epic and lyric, as part of the wider phenomenon of 'traditional referentiality'. In Homer, we can identify many poetically meaningful departures from the usual resonance of a word or type scene.³⁰ Cyclic epic is equally capable of redeploying epithets in untraditional but meaningful ways, as when the *Thebaid* describes Arion as κvanoχαίτης ("black-haired"), the usual epithet of the horse's father Poseidon (fr.11 West); as Pausanias remarks, ancient readers understood the verse to "hint that Poseidon was father to Arion" (αίνισσεσθαι ... τὰ ἔπη Ποσειδῶνα Ἀρίονι εἶναι πατέρα, 8.25.8).³¹

A similar phenomenon is also at play in much lyric poetry.³² Elsewhere in Sappho's own corpus, she describes sparrows as "swift" (ὠκέες στρουθιοί, fr.1.10), deploying an epithet that is only ever used of horses in archaic epic (ὠκέες ἵπποι); in so doing, she sets Aphrodite's animals on a par with the loftier and more martial beasts familiar from heroic epic.³³ In Bacchylides' fifth

²⁹ Note too Sappho's inversion of this Homeric tradition in fr.58c.10: there Dawn "brings" Tithonus to the ends of the world (φέροισα[v]), whereas in Homer she "brings" light to the whole world (φέρει).

³⁰ On such traditional referentiality in Homer see e.g. R. Sacks, *The Traditional Phrase in Homer: Two Studies in Form, Meaning, and Interpretation* (Leiden 1987); J. M. Foley, *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington 1991), and *Homer's Traditional Art* (University Park 1999); A. Kelly, *A Referential Commentary and Lexicon to Iliad VIII* (Oxford 2007).

³¹ Cf. G. L. Huxley, *Greek Epic Poetry from Eumelos to Panyassis* (London 1969) 44–45.

³² For an elegiac example see E. T. E. Barker and J. P. Christensen, "Flight Club: The New Archilochus Fragment and its Resonance with Homeric Epic," *MD* 57 (2006) 9–41, on Archilochus' Telephus fragment.

³³ Horses are ὠκέες 36 times in Homer, and also at *Hom. Hymn. Ap.* 262, Hes. *Scut.* 61, 307. For Sappho's reworking see e.g. H. Zellner, "Sappho's Spar-

epinician, meanwhile, Meleager is called θρασυμέμνος (“brave-spirited,” 5.69), an adjective that is deployed only of Heracles in Homer (*Il.* 5.639, *Od.* 11.267).³⁴ Bacchylides’ extension of the epithet to Meleager is very fitting in context: it occurs during Heracles’ katabatic encounter with Meleager’s shade. But more significantly, it foregrounds the broader parallelism between the two heroes, a parallelism that only grows stronger as the scene progresses; Heracles and Meleager prove close doublets of each other in both their heroic labors and their ultimate deaths.³⁵

As a particularly close *comparandum* for Sappho’s βροδοδάκτυλος, we can cite a short fragment of Ibycus (fr.303a *PMGF*):³⁶

γλαυκώπιδα Κασσάνδραν
 ἔρασιπλόκαμον Πριάμοιο κόραν
 φᾶμις ἔχησι βροτῶν.

The talk of mortals keeps hold of gray-eyed Cassandra, Priam’s daughter with lovely locks.

The adjective γλαυκῶπις is an unusual choice for Cassandra: besides its appearance here, it is only ever used of Athena in archaic epic and lyric.³⁷ Like Dawn’s ῥοδοδάκτυλος, it is a distinctive and defining epithet of a specific goddess. Given this traditional association, Ibycus’ innovative redeployment of the epithet suggests a close connection between Athena and Cassandra. The resulting link invites us to parallel the beauty of both

rows,” *CW* 101 (2008) 435–442, at 441 comparing βροδοδάκτυλος; A. Kelly, “Sappho and Epic,” in *Cambridge Companion to Sappho* 53–64, at 58.

³⁴ D. L. Cairns, *Bacchylides: Five Epinician Odes* (Cambridge 2010) 229.

³⁵ Both heroes are tasked with conquering an animal with threatening ὀδόντες (teeth/tusks), viz. Cerberus (καρχαρόδοντα, 60) and the Calydonian boar (ὀδόντι, 108), and both are ultimately killed by a close female relative, δαίφρων Althaea (137) and Deianeira (Δαΐάνειρα, “man-destroyer,” 173).

³⁶ For a fuller discussion of this fragment’s traditional resonances see T. J. Nelson, *Markers of Allusion in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Cambridge 2023) 157–159.

³⁷ *Iliad* (36 times), *Odyssey* (57), *Homeric Hymns* (7), Hesiod (12); cf. Tyr. fr. 2.16 West; Stesich. fr.18.3 Finglass; Peisander fr.7.1 West; Pind. *Ol.* 7.51, *Nem.* 7.96, 10.7, *Dith.* fr.70d.38–39 Snell-Maehler.

figures (for Cassandra's beauty see *Il.* 13.365–366), but it also evokes the story of Cassandra's rape by Locrian Ajax, an episode in which Athena played a central role: not only did the rape take place in Athena's temple at Troy, violating the goddess' cult statue, but Athena was also the one to punish Ajax with death at sea.³⁸ Through the innovative deployment of a traditional epithet, Ibycus does not want us to focus on Cassandra's "gray-eyed" appearance, but rather flags the underlying mythical connection between the priestess and her patron goddess.

Throughout archaic epic and lyric, we thus find multiple cases where a poet reapplies an epithet to forge or reinforce a connection between two different groups or individuals: between Arion and Poseidon, between horses and sparrows, between Meleager and Heracles, and between Cassandra and Athena. In a similar manner, Sappho's innovative use of the epithet βροδοδάκτυλος allusively aligns Dawn and Selene as comparable goddesses with mortal lovers.

Some might object that our Sappho example is more extreme than any of these *comparanda*, because it seems to go further in ignoring the literal sense of the adjective in question: there is no semantic incongruity in describing Arion as "black-haired," sparrows as "swift," Meleager as "brave-spirited," or Cassandra as "gray-eyed," but can the Moon really be "rose-fingered"? As Eleanor Irwin has demonstrated, the only white rose known to the Greeks (the "dog's bramble," κυνόςβατος) was not categorized as a rose by Theophrastus, Dioscorides, or Theocritus; it is thus extremely unlikely that βροδοδάκτυλος could refer to the white hue of the moon.³⁹

However, such an objection risks anachronism. For a start, even setting aside differences in ancient and modern conceptions of color, we should note that the moon was often regarded as red

³⁸ Cf. *Il.Pers.* arg. 3 West; Alcaeus fr.298 Voigt. See C. L. Wilkinson, *The Lyric of Ibycus* (Berlin 2013) 277.

³⁹ Irwin, *EMC* 38 (1994) 5, 7.

in the ancient Mediterranean;⁴⁰ and it was also imagined to produce “rays” like the sun, matching the spreading “fingers” of dawn.⁴¹ The epithet would thus not have been as incongruous to ancient audiences as it has been for many modern readers. But even if an ancient audience *did* detect a dissonance between the literal meaning of the adjective and its application to the Moon, such incongruity is itself a familiar feature of other cases of traditional referentiality. Perhaps the most famous example is the description of Penelope’s “fat hand” as she establishes the bow contest in *Odyssey* 21 (χειρὶ παχείη, *Od.* 21.6). This verse-end phrase is usually used of male warriors in the midst of conflict; its atypical usage here has been understood to foreshadow the impending battle with the suitors and underscore the fundamental ὁμοφροσύνη (“like-mindedness”) of Odysseus and Penelope.⁴² Traditional referential associations function even beyond literal semantic sense; and indeed, such lack of literal sense can even signpost the underlying allusive connection.⁴³ Even if any of

⁴⁰ Red moon: ὄσηνοιῶδῃ τε σελήνη(ν), *PGM* III.556 (“rötlich leuchtenden Mond”); Aratus *Phaen.* 784 (ἔρευθής), 797 (ἔρευθόμενος); Sen. *Q. Nat.* 7.27.1 (*luna rubeat*); Plut. *De fac.* 21 (esp. 934B–D); and Roman poets’ *Luna rubens*: Prop. 1.10.8; Hor. *Carm.* 2.11.10, *Sat.* 1.8.35; cf. *rubet aurea Phoebus*, Verg. *G.* 1.431. Cf. Macleod, *ZPE* 15 (1974) 220 n.10; Renehan, *HSCP* 87 (1983) 17–19; C. Neri, “In margine a Sapph. fr. 96,8 V.,” *Eikasmos* 12 (2001) 11–18, at 13 n.12; H. Fränkel, *Wege und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens* (Munich 1955) 49.

⁴¹ See Renehan, *HSCP* 87 (1983) 19–20, citing *Hom. Hymn* 32.5–8, 12–13; Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 658B–C (with Ion *TrGF* I 19 F 57), 658F; *PGM* IV.2242–2243; Simonides fr.581.3 *PMG*.

⁴² Foley, *Homer’s Traditional Art* 218–221; A. Vergados, “Penelope’s Fat Hand Reconsidered (*Odyssey* 21, 6),” *WS* 122 (2009) 7–20. Compare and contrast D. Turkeltaub, “Penelope’s ‘Stout Hand’ and Odyssean Humour,” *JHS* 134 (2014) 103–119.

⁴³ Cf. studies of Homeric motif transference that interpret apparent “mistakes” or “inconsistencies” as “important signposts recognizable by the audience”: J. S. Burgess, “Neoanalysis, Orality, and Intertextuality: An Examination of Homeric Motif Transference,” *Oral Tradition* 21 (2006) 148–189, at 170, further noting: “Inappropriateness does not result from unskillful

Sappho's audience members detected a semantic inconcinnity in the description of "rose-fingered Moon," this would only have served as a spur to consider the adjective's broader allusive resonance.

Sappho's use of βροδοδάκτυλος thus invites her audience to reflect on the parallels between the myths of Dawn and Selene. Notably, this is not the only occasion where Sappho alludes to the similarities and differences between celestial figures: as Jenny Strauss Clay has argued, the poet's description of Hesperus in fr.104(a) allusively echoes and contrasts Hesiod's characterization of Dawn (*Op.* 578–581); Sappho's evening star brings in all that Hesiod's shining dawn had scattered.⁴⁴ In fr.96, however, this alignment of celestial figures is particularly appropriate to the poem's wider context, concerned as it is with frustrated desire (ἡμέρωι, 16) and the unsurpassable distance between loved ones.⁴⁵ Neither Selene's nor Dawn's affair proved happy in the end: Endymion suffered eternal sleep, and Tithonus eternal ageing.⁴⁶

The underlying implication may be that preeminent beauty (either that of the Moon or that of the absent woman in Lydia) cannot ultimately guarantee the perpetual accomplishment of desire. The poem certainly encourages such an association:

composition, but rather is designed to force recognition of the context in which the material is usually set."

⁴⁴ J. S. Clay, "Sappho's Hesperus and Hesiod's Dawn," *Philologus* 124 (1980) 302–305.

⁴⁵ Note particularly the contrast between Sappho and her addressee "here" (τυίδε, 2) and their departed friend "there" (κῆθι, 18). McEvelly, *Hermes* 101 (1973) 262–263, notes that Dawn is often evoked by Sappho in epithalamic contexts, and suggests that Sappho's re-use of the epithet here belongs to a broader inversion of wedding song in fr.96.

⁴⁶ Endymion: schol. Ap. Rhod. 4.57–58; Apollonius' Selene claims that love causes "much-grievous pain" (πολύστονον ἄλγος, 4.65), in an episode that betrays Sapphic debts: B. Acosta-Hughes, *Arion's Lyre: Archaic Lyric into Hellenistic Poetry* (Princeton 2010) 57–59. Tithonus: *Hom. Hymn. Aphr.* 218–238. Cf. T. Gantz, *Early Greek Myth I* (Baltimore 1993) 35–37. Cf. too Dawn's unhappy relationship with Orion: *Od.* 5.121–124.

Sappho's addressee is explicitly said to resemble a goddess (θέαι κέλαν, 4).⁴⁷ But as the rest of the poem demonstrates, this god-like stature does not save her from loss and longing—which is no surprise, since even the “rose-fingered” Moon, like the “rose-fingered” Dawn, could not escape the sorrows of love.

In sum, therefore, Sappho's description of Selene as βροδοδάκτυλος is an integral part of her poem's larger design. Not only does it fit with her broader application of floral imagery in the poem and throughout her corpus, but it also manifests an allusive strategy that can be paralleled elsewhere in archaic Greek poetry. By describing the Moon with the traditional language of Dawn, Sappho closely aligns the pair and acknowledges their similarities as goddesses famous for their affairs with mortals. They serve as examples for Atthis and her now-far-absent friend that even immortal women cannot enjoy their love without eventual loss. Any incongruity felt when reading ἄ βροδοδάκτυλος σελάννα is intentional and poetically meaningful. Emending the Moon's epithet would only demolish this literary resonance and the sophistication of Sappho's allusive artistry.⁴⁸

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⁴⁷ There are some textual difficulties in line 4, but the comparison with a goddess (or goddesses: θέαισ') seems certain: see Neri, *Saffo* 734–735. A further explicit comparison to goddesses occurs at 21–23, perhaps alongside another mortal-goddess pair, Adonis and Aphrodite (Ἀ[δ]ωνίδιον, 23 suppl. Edmonds; Ἀφροδίτα, 26; cf. n.27 above), but this might be the beginning of a different poem: see variously Lardinois, in *Reading Sappho* 161–162; Hutchinson, *Greek Lyric* 185–186; Neri, *Saffo* 733–734.

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