

Joseph Addison  
(1672-1719)

## THE SPECTATOR

Thursday, November 22, 1711

...Spirat adhuc amor  
Vivuntque commissi calores  
Æolæ fidibus puellæ.

Hor.

Among the many famous Pieces of Antiquity which are still to be seen at *Rome*, there is the Trunc of a Statue which has lost the Arms, Legs and Head, but discovers such an exquisite Workmanship in what remains of it, that *Michael Angelo* declared he had learned his whole Art from it. Indeed he studied it so attentively, that he made most of his Statues, and even his Pictures in that *gusto*, to make use of the *Italian* Phrases; for which reason this maimed Statue is still called *Michael Angelo's* School.

A Fragment of *Sappho*, which I design for the Subject of this Paper, is in as great Reputation among the Poets and Criticks, as the mutilated Figure above-mentioned is among the Statuaries and Painters. Several of our country-men, and Mr. *Dryden* in particular, seem very often to have copied after it in their Dramatick Writings, and in their Poems upon Love.

Whatever might have been the Occasion of this Ode, the *English* reader will enter into the Beauties of it, if he supposes it to have been written in the Person of a Lover sitting by his Mistress. I shall set to view three different Copies of this beautiful Original. The first is a Translation by *Catullus*, the second by Monsieur *Boileau*, and the last by a Gentleman, whose Translation of the *Hymn to Venus* has been so deservedly admired.

*Ad Lesbiam.*

*Ille mi par esse deo videtur,  
Ille si fas est, superare divos,  
Qui sedens adversus identidem te,  
Spectat, & audit  
Dulce Ridentem, misero quod omnis  
Eripit sensus mihi: nam simul te  
Lesbia adspexi, nihil est super mi*

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*Quod loquar amens.  
Lingua sed torpet, tenuis sub artus  
Flamma dimanat, sonitu suopte  
Tinniunt aures, gemina teguntur  
Lumina nocte.*

My Learned Reader will know very well the Reason why one of these Verses is Printed in *Roman* Letter; and if he compares this Translation with the Original, will find that the three first Stanza's are rendered almost Word for Word, and not only with the same Elegance, but with the same short Turn of Expression which is so remarkable in the *Greek*, and so peculiar to the *Sapphick* Ode. I cannot imagine for what reason Madame *Dacier* has told us that this Ode of [...]

The second Translation of this Fragment which I shall here cite, is that of Monsieur *Boileau's*.

Heureux! qui prés de toi, pour toi seule souûpire :  
Qui jouïit du plaisir de t'entendre parler :  
Qui te voit quelquefois doucement lui souûrire.  
Les Dieux, dans son bonheur, peuvent-ils l'égaler?

Je sens de veine en veine une subtile flamme  
Courir par tout mon corps, si-tost que je te vois :  
Et dans les doux transports, où s'egare mon ame,  
Je ne sçauerois trouver de langue, ni de voix.

Un nuage confus se répand sur va vuë,  
Je n'entens plus, je tombe en de douces langueurs;  
Et pasle, sans haleine, interdite, esperduë,  
Un frisson me saisit, je tremble, je me meurs.

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The Reader will see that this is rather an Imitation than a Translation. The Circumstances do not lie so thick together, and follow one another with that Vehemence and Emotion as in the Original. In Short, Monsieur *Boileau* has given us all the Poetry, but not all the Passion of this famous Fragment.

I shall in the last Place present my Reader with the *English* Translation.

### I.

Blest as th'Immortal Gods is be,  
The Youth who fondly sits by thee,  
And hears and sees thee all the while  
Softly speak and sweetly smile.

### II.

'Twas this depriv'd my Soul of Rest,  
And rais'd such Tumults in my Breast;  
For while I gaz'd, in Transport tost,  
My Breath was gone, my Voice was lost:

### III.

My Bosom glow'd; the subtle Flame  
Ran quick thro' all my vital Frame;  
O'er my dim Eyes a Darkness bung;  
My Ears with hollow Murmurs rung:

### IV.

In demy Damps my Limbs were chill'd;  
My Blood with gentle Horrors thrill'd;  
My feeble Pulse forgot to play;  
I fainted, sunk, and dy'd away.

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Instead of giving any Character of this last Translation, I shall desire my Learned Reader to look into the Criticisms which *Longinus* has made upon the Original. By that means he will know to which of the Translations he ought to give the Preference. I shall only add, that this Translation is written in the very Spirit of *Sappho*, and as near the *Greek* as the Genius of our Language will possibly suffer.

*Longinus* has observed, that this Description of Love in *Sappho* is an exact Copy of Nature, and that all the Circumstances, which follow one another in such an hurry of Sentiments, notwithstanding they appear repugnant to each other, are really such as happen in the Phrenzies of Love.

I wonder that no one of the Criticks or Editors, through whose Hands this Ode has passed, has taken occasion from it to mention a Circumstance related by *Plutarch*. That Author in the Famous Story of *Antiochus*, who fell in Love with *Stratonice*, his Mother in Law, and (not daring to discover his Passion) pretended to be confined to his Bed by Sickness, tells us, that *Erasistratus*, the Physician, found out the Nature of his Distemper by those Symptoms of Love which he had learnt from *Sappho's* Writings. *Stratonice* was in the Room of the Love-sick Prince, when these Symptoms discovered themselves to his Physician; and it is probable that they were not very different from those which *Sappho* here describes in a Lover sitting by his Mistress. This Story of *Antiocus* is so well known, that I need not add the Sequel of it, which has no Relation to my present Subject.

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