SAPPHO AND ENHEDUANNA

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My friend Pat Monaghan in her enchanting book – *THE RED-HAIRED GIRL FROM THE BOG* – tells a story of decades of searching for her ancestors – human and archetypal – in Ireland. She writes:

> “Like every woman, I am turning into her, into the wild creative hag who has always lived in my soul,” adding, “There is more passion in a woman’s heart than her body can contain.”[1]

What’s a woman to do with this wild creature inside? Growing up in the 1930s and ‘40s within the strict Protestant values of north Texas, I looked upon her in wonder, this wild hag who raised her head inside my body, stirring my desires.

My father, a successful businessman, had a passionate hobby. Beginning in his adolescence, he spent his free time perfecting his performance as a magician. Naturally, he brought this obsession into his marriage to my mother – a genteel southern lady, a school teacher from Tennessee. During the depression they saved enough of the salary he earned managing a clothing store to buy a foreclosed house where my parents lived until their deaths.

Ten or so years ago, by one of those fateful coincidences, a man I had known as a child, who was then the young son of the assistant pastor of the First Methodist Church we attended, bought “our” house. My discovery that he lived there occurred when Charlotte, one of my childhood girlfriends still living in my old home town, Wichita Falls, sent me a newspaper clipping picturing this man and his wife in “our” living room. The story that accompanied the photo featured his wife, who had just been elected president of the American Literary Translators Association, and noted that my friend had been poet laureate of Texas.

I contacted them immediately. We began a friendship based on our life-long acquaintance and our mutual passion for literary translation, not to mention our love for this old house. Jim, the new owner, called me one day perplexed, and asked, “Betty, what is that huge green metal pole outside the living room window?” That pole was part of a magic trick my father had invented in which he miraculously floated me on a board on the “stage” he had built at one end of our living room, a raised stage with proscenium arch and red velvet curtains that opened and closed with a rope pulley. In the space under the stage, fifty metal folding chairs rolled on a series of connecting dollies. We set them up periodically for shows to entertain soldiers at Shepherd Field during World War II, or to honor visiting performers, like the noted magician Blackstone.

During the war, we saved our gasoline rationing stamps all year so we could drive to Los Angeles for the convention of the International Brotherhood of Magicians, held at the Santa Monica auditorium. One year, my older sister and I performed in an elaborate magic trick my father had created, using props manufactured at the garment factory he and a partner now owned. We won the prize for the best amateur act, and the huge gold trophy we brought home sat on the piano in our living room, somewhat to my social-climbing mother’s embarrassment.

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1 Patricia Monaghan, The Red-Haired Girl from the Bog (Novato, California: New World Library, 2003).

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Our household was ruled by my father, not just by his obsession with magic, but by his driven and domineering personality. All of us, especially my mother, feared displeasing or angering him. In this atmosphere, there was no reference to a sense of an individual self that a woman or a man experiences, no reference to the potential for an inner life. No place at all for women's sexual feelings or women's sexual body. Although this situation certainly depended on the particular character of the two individuals, my mother and my father, it perfectly mimicked, even caricatured, the larger Texas society. Men ruled. Nice women, always called girls no matter their age, were by and large silent.

I first heard of menstrual periods from my girlfriends. We were sitting on the floor of the den in Charlotte's house. We had just learned to give the finger, and were displaying our prowess to each other. Ignorant of what exactly that gesture meant, we knew it was the worst possible curse you could wish on anybody. By some intuitive leap, my friends were then trying to spell menstruation. "MENS…," one of them began. "No, stupid," I interrupted. I was the smart kid. "A-d-m-i-n-i-s-t-r-a-t-i-o-n," I corrected. Then they told me, and I learned for the first time what was about to happen in my body, in all of our young bodies. As far as I can remember, this conversation and others like it were the totality of my sex education.

Given this naivety and upbringing, is it any wonder that the psyche sent me a powerful compensatory message. In the late 1970s, as my 25 year marriage was coming to an end, the willful, outrageous, sexy Sumerian goddess Inanna appeared to me in a dream. In the dream, I and a group of three or four women unknown to me are preparing the graves of a married couple, individuals whom I knew at the time, both alive and not actually married to each other. The two were Jungian analysts, prominent elders in the Jungian community in southern California where I had just completed training. The woman had already died, and we were placing on her fresh grave strange stick figures that curved into a circle at the top, along with tied bundles of palm fronds. Next, we prepared the man's grave. He was alive still, and confirmed the importance of our preparations as we placed similar stick figures and palm fronds in the soft dirt that was to cover his body.

Some months later in a book I was reading, I came across an illustration of a pair of figures like the ones in the dream. With some sleuthing, I discovered that the pole curving into a circle at the top was the earliest pictographic sign of the Sumerian goddess Inanna, the first depiction from the late 4th millennium BCE, of the cuneiform sign that wrote her name. I had never heard of Inanna and knew nothing about the Sumerians. I later learned that among her many characteristics, Inanna was goddess of the date palm, so abundant in her native land, present-day southern Iraq.

My first attempts to understand Inanna came from general histories and mythologies – none very interesting. Then, a 1981 issue of the magazine *Parabola* featured translations by noted Assyriologist Samuel Noah Kramer, together with storytelling performance artist Diane Wolkstein. The excerpts from their book *Inanna – Queen of Heaven and Earth* – included songs from the Sacred Marriage ritual, the festival that ushered in the New Year in most ancient Sumerian cities. At the culmination of the ritual, Inanna, played by the high priestess of her temple, invites Dumuzi, her consort/lover, played by the king, to her bed to consummate the marriage. Her invitation comes in the form of a love song. These luscious, explicit poems are written from the woman's point of view. When you hear them, you will understand why I was compelled to learn to translate Sumerian. Here is an example that features the curved shape of women's private parts, curved like the crescent moon that shines perfectly horizontal in Iraq, or like the curved star-handle of the Big Dipper.

> peg my vulva
> my star-sketched horn of the Dipper
> moor my slender boat of heaven
> my new moon crescent beauty

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I wait an unplowed desert,
fallow field for the wild ducks
my high mound longs for the floodlands

my vulva field is open
this maid asks who will plow it
vulva moist in the floodlands
the queen asks who brings the ox

the king, Lady, will plow it
Dumuzi, king, will plow it

plow then, man of my heart
holy water-bathed loins
holy Ninegal am I

Need I tell you that nothing I ever sang or heard in the Methodist Church in Wichita Falls contained the smallest hint of such a message as that in the Sumerian love songs from the Sacred Marriage ritual. The only relationship between the two institutions is that both represented the dominant religious organizations of their respective cultures.

The themes of the Sumerian love songs are unique in ancient sacred literature. Archeologists have found among the remains of inscribed clay cuneiform tablets, thirty-seven of the love songs containing some 1700 lines of poetry. Every song is written from the woman's point of view, her desire, yes, her insistence on sexual satisfaction, her descriptions of sexual arousal, her explicit instructions on how to give her pleasure. Not one of the songs mentions having babies or motherhood. Inanna was never a mother.

The earliest archeological evidence in Mesopotamia of the centrality and sacred nature of sexual intercourse comes from 48 clay representations of couples in the act, dating from 3500 – 2700 BCE. The beautiful Uruk Vase, dating from 3100 – 2900 BCE, is thought to depict the ritual of the Sacred Marriage. On the top register of the vase, a priestess welcomes the king into the temple of Inanna. Two stately emblems of Inanna, the tall pole that curves into a circle, stand behind the human priestess. The outlined-shape of this vase appears in pairs on a number of ancient cylinder seals, suggesting that, like the cross or the Star of David, this shape of the vase carried sacred meaning and was an icon of Sumerian religion. The only surviving example of the Uruk Vase was stolen from the Iraq Museum in Baghdad the day of the US invasion. Fortunately, when the museum director granted amnesty to those who looted, the vase, slightly damaged, was returned.

The Sacred Marriage was celebrated at the spring equinox at the time of the disappearance of the moon. Elements of the ritual that were observed throughout Sumer included the ritual setting up of the bed, the bathing of Inanna – the priestess, then the entrance of Dumuzi – the king or his representative. The intimate relationship between the king and Inanna stretches from the 4th millennium Early Dynastic period, 3000 BCE, to the Middle Assyrian period in the 2nd millennium, 1400 to 1050 BCE, a period of 2000 years.

A revival of the Sacred Marriage occurred in the mid-1st millennium BCE. Around the same time, the Biblical Song of Songs with its similar motifs appeared. In the 7th century BCE, the Neo-Assyrian empire controlled the Syro-Palestinian area, homeland of the Song, and texts of the Sacred Marriage the Assyrians still celebrated may well have contributed to elements in the Song. Scholars believe that ideas expressed in the Song are almost certainly a direct continuation of the Near Eastern love poetry that originated almost three thousand years before in Sumer.[2] As in the Song, the most dominant themes of the Sumerian love poetry express the woman's point of view and her sexuality.

2 Lapinkivi, P. *The Sumerian Sacred Marriage.* (Helsinki: SAAS vol. XV, 2004), 85-94.

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The poems suggest a very different perception from our own in the Sumerian culture toward women's bodies, and uniquely express the centrality of women's desire and ecstatic experience of sexual pleasure. "She wants the bed / she wants it" one poem chants. "The joy of her heart bed / with his sweet thing bed / with his sweet thing." In another poem Inanna speaks for herself.

I want you, Dumuzi
Your bough raised
Dumuzi you belong in this house

Listen
I will scrub my skin with soap
I will rinse all over with water
I will dry myself with linen
I will lay out mighty love clothes

I know how exactly
I will look so fine!
I will make you feel like a king!

Inanna was never a mother. No mention occurs in any of the texts that the purpose of the Sacred Marriage was to encourage fertility. When Inanna shouts, "plough then, man of my heart / holy water-bathed loins," she calls only for the joyous pleasure of it, not pregnancy. In Sumer woman was not a furrow anticipating seeds.

In contrast, Greek writers as early as Hesiod and Homer connect woman's body with earth and agricultural fertility. Hesiod was, like Homer, an 8th century poet. He may speak from an even more ancient mythology than Homer. He begins with reverence and awe for the earth as mother, saying, "Out of Chaos came the broad breasted Earth." His writings idealize the uncultivated bounty of the earth and warn against opening, plowing, cultivating her complete, natural original state. In his idealism he raves against the evil of women – or woman as epitomized by Pandora: "her shameless [canine] mind, and a deceitful [thieving] nature." "She removes the lid of a great jar and brings terrible doom on men," quotes Page du Bois, professor of Classics at the University of California San Diego, as she characterizes in her book, *Sowing the Body* the attitude toward Pandora. In the *Theogony* of Hesiod, Pandora herself is evil. "From her comes the fair sex / yes, wicked womenfolk are her descendants. / They live among mortal men as a nagging burden / and are no good shares of abject want, but only of wealth." "…a scourge to toiling men," Hesiod adds in *Work and Days.*[3] Both views exist side by side in ancient Greece, du Bois explains, "reverence and awe for earth and woman, and evidence of a desire to bypass the female, to appropriate her powers to represent the male as self sufficient."[4]

Homer likewise equated woman's body with the earth. The unplowed, fertile field was her sexual organs. Du Bois sums up his attitude, saying, "This metaphor, associating the woman's body and the earth, which establishes a metaphorical connection between the field and her sexual organs, is a traditional analogy, as Plutarch demonstrates," when he writes, "The Athenians observe three sacred plowings… But the most sacred of all such sowings is the marital sowing and ploughing for the procreation of children… herefore man and wife ought especially to indulge in this with circumspection keeping themselves pure from all unholy and unlawful intercourse with others, and not sowing seed from which they are unwilling to have any offspring."[5]

In the 5th century era of Greek classicism, the woman as citizen gave the legitimacy of citizenship to her children. Therefore her sexual purity was essential. Du Bois sums up her argument:

3 du Bois, Page. Sowing the Body – Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 46.

4 Ibid., 57.

5 Ibid., 39, quoting Plutarch, Coniuglia precept 114b.

> The goal of the Greek male is to dominate the female and her body, to control its potentiality, to subdue it to his interests… The fear of women's bodies comes not from its roundedness but from its power to wound… Women can burn, devour… and murder. But they are not seen as castrated; rather, they often want to keep their bodies unopened, unbroken. It is the wife, the mature woman, who is broken into, opened up, not the girl. The girl is wild, untamed, like a horse, an unpainted jar, the unploughed earth; she must be converted into a furrow, a *pithos* with household goods inside, an oven cooking children.[6]

By contrast, the elevation in the Sumerian Sacred Marriage of woman's desire articulates in the year's most important ritual, a model of self-assertion. Women in the culture mature into adulthood with this model before their eyes. The model teaches young women, "my growing, maturing body is beautiful," as Inanna sings, here calling herself Baba:

> Now my breasts stand up
> Now hair has grown on my vulva
> Going to the bridegroom's loins, let us rejoice
> O Baba, let us rejoice over my vulva!
> Dance! Dance!
> Afterwards, they will please him, will please him![7]

Is it possible to imagine developing this point of view toward women and girls in our modern Western culture? Can you imagine as a woman dancing with your adolescent companions, or with your women elders, as your body and your desires evolved? My girlfriends, sitting on the floor of the den in Charlotte's house in north Texas, spontaneously began this dance. Excitement was swelling in our young bodies.

The two poets I am presenting, Enheduanna and Sappho, write with unquestioning confidence as they depict their lived experience. Enheduanna in the 3rd millennium grew to adulthood hearing the poems of the Sacred Marriage that glorify women's bodies. Inanna became Enheduanna's own personal deity. As the first author of historical record, she occupies an unique place, the first individual to write from her own subjective experience. She speaks candidly from awareness of a self, her own self. She prizes her subjectivity and expresses it strongly in her writings. She opens a window into her most private thoughts and feelings.

Sappho, who is better known to us, does the same. She moves us with the poignancy of her longing and the exquisite immediacy of her lyric phrases. Sappho expresses more explicitly than Enheduanna the intensity of her desire and the pleasure and beauty in the female body. Du Bois describes Sappho's eroticism as "arbitrary, contrary to current demand that we choose a sexual identity."[8]

Do Enheduanna and Sappho represent the historical discovery of the subjective self? Before the translations in the 1960s of Enheduanna's writings, scholars thought Sappho was the first individual known to describe and create from a sense of her own subjectivity. In her book *Sappho Is Burning,* du Bois emphasizes Sappho's role,

> Sappho is a crucial figure in this process of separating out individuality from the communal mass of pre-urban society… Her poetic project seems to include the establishing of an individual

6 Ibid., 147.

7 Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Harps That Once…,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 18.

8 Page du Bois, *Sappho is Burning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.25.

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> form of identity, a figuring of human energy that now seems commonplace.[9]

Sappho famously writes:

> Some say cavalry and others claim
> infantry or a fleet of long oars
> is the supreme sight on the black earth.
> I say it is
> the one you love[10]

The one you love. Du Bois cites this poem as Sappho's articulation of a new kind of thinking, one that raises "the desiring self," individual subjectivity, over the heretofore supreme establishment as in this poem of military power. Individual identity, du Bois asserts, represents a new stage in the development of consciousness. "The emergence of the individual in lyric poetry is an extraordinary event, even "world-historical" event."[11]

Now we have discovered a poet, Enheduanna, 1700 years before Sappho, who also expresses in her work her internal emotional self. Recording her passionate feelings with a stylus on damp clay appears to be not a sudden discovery of the internal self, but the most natural, frank expression of pressing emotions and desires.

Enheduanna was daughter of King Sargon, who around 2300 BCE, created the first empire in history. Sargon was a Semite, who spoke the Akkadian language. He founded the city of Akkad, whose location is uncertain, but is thought to be very near the city of Baghdad. From this city in the northern-most part of the territory of Sumer, he led his armies to subdue all the Sumerian-speaking city states in the south, cities that had managed to prosper together for hundreds of years.

He conquered Inanna's formidable thousand year old city of Uruk on the Euphrates, the largest city in the ancient world until Rome. He conquered Ur in the south, near the Persian Gulf, from whose midst a thousand years later Abraham and Sara were to follow Abraham's father north to Haran and move eventually west to Canaan to found a new religion. Sargon's territory stretched from the Mediterranean on the west to the Tigris on the east. His excursions and outposts reached into present-day Iran, north into Syria and Turkey, and south beyond the Persian Gulf.

Sargon had two sons, Rimush and Manistushu, who ruled after him, and a daughter, Enheduanna. Growing up in the palace, Enheduanna became literate in both Akkadian, her father's language, and Sumerian, which some think was her mother's language. Sumerian was certainly the language of a large group of the population, particularly scholars. Both languages were written in cuneiform script, the world's first successful writing method. In cuneiform script, syllables and words are represented by signs which are combinations of wedge-shaped marks made by gently pressing a writing tool known as a "qan tuppi" into a wet clay tablet.

The poetry attributed to Enheduanna was copied in Mesopotamian scribal schools for centuries after her death. It then remained buried until the 19th century, when cuneiform tablets were discovered by archaeologists. Once cuneiform script was deciphered, first Akkadian and then Sumerian language and literature began to be understood.

Probably at a young age, Enheduanna was appointed by her father to be the high priestess in the temple of the moon god, Nanna, in the far southern city of Ur. There she served for almost forty years in the most prestigious religious position in the country. A brilliant poet, Enheduanna is the first author of historical record. The writings attributed to her include three long poems to her personal deity Inanna and forty-two hymns written to important temples in 36 cities throughout

9 Ibid., p. 7.
10 Barnstone, p. 79.
11 du Bois, *Burning*, 106.

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Sumer. Her work is little known, having been discovered and translated by scholars only in the 1960s. Short excerpts have been included in anthologies of women poets. I have now translated and published in two books all of her known work, first the three devotional poems to Inanna, and recently, the 42 Temple Hymns. I searched literally for years for a publisher of the first book and finally secured a 'yes,' ironically from the University of Texas Press.

Both Enheduanna and Sappho were respected in antiquity then almost lost only to be rediscovered. Sappho was praised as an exceptional lyric poet in her lifetime. In the 4th century BCE, Plato referred to her as "the tenth muse," and has Socrates describe her as "the beautiful Sappho." Willis Barnstone, in his 2006 complete translation of her work, says Sappho is the foremost lyric poet of Greek and Roman antiquity. He says, "We know Sappho more intimately than any other ancient poet… She has permitted us to overhear her longing and intelligence, her humor and anger, and her perception of beauty." She is, he says, "Europe's first woman poet."[12]

Sappho was born on Lesbos, a large island just west of the coast of Asia Minor. Hers was a wealthy family of sufficient prominence and influence in the community that a hostile regime once forced them into exile. She lived most of her life in the major city of Mytilini, currently the name of this island and of its capital city. She had two, possibly three brothers. She may have married a wealthy merchant named Kerkylas, and had a daughter, Kleis.

Sappho would have written on papyrus or on wooden tablets overlaid with wax. Her work was extensive. Scholars in Alexandria collected her writings into nine books, the first book having 1320 lines. What remains to us now are only fragments of a total of 2000 lines. In 380 CE, a Christian bishop ordered the burning of all of her writings because of their immoral descriptions of homoeroticism. Subsequent copies were burned, pillaged, or otherwise destroyed. Nevertheless, her work seems to have been preserved until the 11th century CE, but was finally destroyed in the sacking of Constantinople by the Crusaders in the 13th century.

In spite of these efforts to erase Sappho from the face of the earth, fragments of her work survived in the writings of others. Then in the late 1800s, explorers of antiquities in the Nile Valley found segments of her work on papyri used as paper-mâché in mummy wrappings. However, these strips would contain only a long panel of one side of the torn papyrus, a column of unrelated words.

Sappho's homoeroticism managed to raise eyebrows well into the 20th century. Attempts continued to "rehabilitate her moral character" and to deny access to her writing.[13] This attitude toward Sappho's homoeroticism is contrary to the possibility that in Sappho's aristocratic world, as du Bois asserts, "a rich and varied sexual existence" was the norm "that included as objects of desire both males and females."[14] Her attitude toward sexual pleasure disrupts the prevalent western tradition "of compulsory heterosexuality, egoism, consumerism."[15]

Enheduanna and Sappho are two poets who speak to us from their unique personal experience. Seventeen hundred years separate their lives. Nevertheless, their common humanity and exceptional talent preserve for us the poignancy of their suffering, the intense beauty of their perceptions, the fullness of their love directed toward persons human and divine. Here are two brilliant women, exceptional in their ability to express the nuances of their private, interior worlds. Each had entered into an intense, passionate, dependent relationship with a chosen goddess – Enheduanna with Inanna and Sappho with Aphrodite. Here are poems from each of them to their chosen goddesses.

12 Willis Barnstone, *Sweetbitter Love – Poems of Sappho* (Boston: Shambhala, 2006), xvi, xviii.

13 Ibid., xxxi.

14 du Bois, pp. 14,15.

15 Ibid., 25.

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In the poem, *Lady of Largest Heart*, Enheduanna speaks in the first person, rare in Sumerian literature, desperately trying to get the beneficent attention of Inanna. She writes from her rooms in the Temple of the Moon God Nanna in Ur.

I
I am Enheduanna
High Priestess of Nanna
with single heart
I am devoted to Nanna

(then 20 lines missing, she continues)

I plead with you
I say STOP
the bitter hating heart and sorrow

my Lady
what day will you have mercy
how long will I cry a moaning prayer
I am yours
why do you slay me
may your heart be cooled toward me
I cry I plead
for your attentive thoughts

may I stand before you
may your eyes shine upon me
take my measure

I
who spread over the land
the splendid brilliance
of your divinity
you allow my flesh
to know your scourging

my sorrow and bitter trial
strike my eye as treachery
tear me down from heaven
mercy compassion attention
returning your heart to someone
folded-hand prayer
are yours Inanna

your storm-shot torrents
drench the bare earth
moisten to life

moisture-bearing light
floods the dark

O my Lady
my Queen
I unfold your splendor in all lands
I extol your glory
I will praise your course
your sweeping grandeur

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forever
return your heart to me

In one of the few of her poems preserved in its entirety, here is Sappho's poem to her goddess Aphrodite, called *Prayer to Aphrodite,* Willis Barnstone's translation.

On our dappled throne eternal Aphrodite,
cunning daughter of Zeus,
I beg you do not crush my heart
with pain, O lady,

but come here if ever before
you heard my voice from far away,
and yielding left your father's house
of gold and came,

yoking birds to your chariot. Beautiful
quick sparrows whirring on beating wings
took you from heaven down to mid sky
over black earth

and soon arrived. O blessed one,
on your deathless face a smile,
you asked me what I am suffering
and why I call you,

what I most want to happen
in my crazy heart. "Whom shall I persuade
again to take you into her love? Who,
O Psapfo, wrongs you?

If she runs away, soon she will pursue.
If she scorns gifts, now she will bribe.
If she doesn't love, soon she will love
even unwillingly."

Come to me now and loosen me
from blunt agony. Labor
and fill my heart with fire. Stand by me
and be my ally.

Sappho's lyrical voice, her sense of humor, her sweet passions, her demands for help, even from an exalted goddess, place her among the immortals. The lyricism in Enheduanna's poetry is not as easily accessible to our western ears. Still, the perceptions of a poet shine through in her work.

your storm-shot torrents
drench the bare earth
moisten to life
moisture-bearing light
floods the dark

Sappho pleads to Zeus to "come / to my / severities."[16] Sappho's "severities," her suffering comes when she has lost a love. In this almost complete text #31, she describes her agony.

[16] Ibid., 21.

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Seizure

To me he seems equal to gods,
the man who sits facing you
and hears you near as you speak
    softly and laugh

in a sweet echo that jolts
the heart in my ribs. Now
when I look at you a moment
    my voice is empty

and can say nothing as my tongue
cracks and slender fire races
under my skin. My eyes are dead
    to light, my ears

pound, and sweat pours over me.
I convulse, greener than grass
and feel my mind slip as I go
    close to death.

Yet I must suffer, even poor[17]

Enheduanna, like Sappho, describes her suffering as dying when she cries out to the moon god she serves, Nanna, also called “the White One,” Ashimbabbar. These lines written to Inanna are from a poem in which she has been thrown out of her temple by a usurping priest or general.

I am dying
that I must sing
this sacred song

I
even I
Nanna ignores my straits
am I to be ruined by treachery

I
even I
Ashimbabbar
neglects my case

whether he neglects me
or not
what does it matter
that man threw me out of the temple
I who served triumphant

he made me fly
like swallows swept
from their holes in the wall

he eats away at my life
I wander through thorny brush in the mountains
he robbed me

[17] Ibid., 73.

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of the true crown
of the High Priestess

he gave me
the ritual dagger of mutilation
he said
"it becomes you"

precious Queen
loved by An
rekindle for me
your holy heart

beloved wife of the sky dragon
great Lady
who spans the tree of heaven
trunk to crown

may you cool your heart for me

Enheduanna and Sappho express similar involvements in women's concerns, for example with dressing, with appearance. Sappho's fragments leave these intriguing morsels:

Sandal

Colorful straps covered
her feet
in beautiful Lydian work

Garment

She was wrapped all around with a delicate
woven cloth

Robe

robe
colored with saffron

purple robe
cloak

garland crown
beauty

Phrygian purple
rugs

This last fragment, *Robe,* could be the first words of a poem whose body was torn away to make a strip of papyrus for wrapping a mummy.

In the next verses Enheduanna dresses, prepares for her re-entrance into her temple, after her expulsion and abandonment. The eminent Queen she mentions in the first line is Inanna.

the eminent Queen
guardian of the throne room
receives her prayer

the holy heart
of Inanna
returns to her

the day is favorable
she dresses lavishly
in woman's allure

she glows with beauty's shine
like the light of the rising moon

Women worshipping the goddess was a concern for both poets. Two brief fragments of Sappho's express this theme.

Moon and Woman

The moon appeared in her fullness
when women took their place around the altar

Dancers at a Kritan Altar

Kritan women once danced supplely
around a beautiful altar with light feet,

crushing the soft flowers of grass

In this brief poem Enheduanna suggests a whole theology, as she elucidates the relationship of a group of women consecrated to their goddess Inanna.

those warrior women
like a single thread
come forth from beyond the river
do common work in devotion to you
whose hands sear them with purifying fire

your many devoted
who will be burnt
like sun-scorched firebricks
pass before your eyes

Devotion to Inanna, she says, involves searing and burning, not unlike the ordeals of living with the insights that come from the unconscious psyche. The hands of Inanna sear her devotees with purifying fire. Enheduanna in this poem written 4000 years ago, describes a process of individuation. The warrior women come forth from beyond the river. These particular women were one of a number of groups of women mentioned in Enheduanna's writing and in other Sumerian literature, who lived apart, sometimes in a temple consecrated to a goddess. "Your many devoted / who will be burnt / like sun-scorched fire bricks / pass before your eyes." Consecrated devotion to Inanna is devotion to a divine being – to a larger, knowing reality – whose searing – burning away of excess, of ego-dominating willful desires, purifies the devotee into a relationship of harmonious access to Inanna, to the Self.

Enheduanna dares to imagine what lies beyond human sight and knowledge. She embellishes famed Sumerian motifs with her rich imagination and poetic sensibilities. Her warrior women face the challenge of individuation, endure the necessary searing fires of achieving an authentic identity rooted in the depths of one's soul.

In her poem of exile she expresses the suffering of a single individual cast out, alone in the wilderness. She finds no comfort in the thorny brush. She wanders lost, in despair.

Enheduanna and Sappho open to expression their potent responses to dramatic events in their lives. Sappho allows us to witness the most intimate, sensual touch of her aroused sexuality. Enheduanna asks us to accompany her in torturous exile. Her love affair is with Inanna. "Child of yours, bride of yours," she identifies herself to her beloved goddess.

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In the post-modern era, women and men alike can reject the preceding dominant male narrative. Jung's brilliant insights direct us to observe the complexity of the psyche, to mine its depths, to separate wisdom that compels us to broaden the scope of self-understanding for the individual.

For women, that wild hag pressures us to express the passion that comes bidden or unbidden. The attitudes in the Sumerian love poetry and Sacred Marriage ritual versus the strict control the Greeks express toward women's bodies are opposite cultural attitudes that inform collective norms. Neither extreme can be reinstated in western society.

The importance of naming these opposite cultural attitudes enables us to support our individuality and to find its unique expression – this human imperative – brilliantly executed by the two women of antiquity, Enheduanna and Sappho.

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