WOMEN AS POETS

H. investigates the use of gendered nouns denoting 'poet', mainly *aoidos* and *poiētēs*, in Greek literature from Homer to the end of the Hellenistic age. She argues that category nouns like 'poet' were as important as proper nouns to self-definition and that texts worked to reaffirm that a 'poet' could only be male. Women poets had no name by which to identify themselves and struggled to denote their identity as poets. H. describes her project (p. 2) as 'aim[ing] to provide a new perspective on the history of Greek literature as a battleground of gender' and as recovering women's efforts to find ways to name themselves 'poet'.

An introduction on gendered vocabulary for poets in modern languages, including English, discusses the complexities of gendered naming and explains that the book's focus is on the gender of the figure in the text and/or speaking from the text, not necessarily the author's own. Here and throughout the book H. shows an impressive command of scholarship. The following chapters are divided into four parts. The three chapters of Part 1 discuss the works of Homer, Hesiod and the *Homeric Hymns*, specifically the use of *aoidos* in each. Part 2 contains chapters on Aristophanes' and Plato's use of *poiētēs*. Part 3 addresses in two chapters the terms for female poets used by Euripides and by prose writers from Herodotus to Antipater. Part 4 contains a chapter on Sappho and one on female poets from Sappho to Nossis, focusing on the alternatives to *aoidos* or *poiētēs* that women poets found. Each chapter concentrates on one or more passages in the works of the writer(s) and offers a gender analysis of the presentation of the poet. It is thus a book full of detailed readings of individual passages. The Greek for each is given in a footnote.

One might think that male gender was so firmly established in ancient Greece as normative that there was no need to underline it, but H. treats the gender of a noun as the pre-eminent feature of its meaning. Any use of feminine nouns or participles in a situation involving poetic speech therefore becomes a challenge to male ownership. Conversely, the masculine gender of the nouns for 'poet' stands out as carrying an exclusionary meaning: the male-gendered figure cannot be female. We should recognise the inherent elision of female poets that this battle entails.

To illustrate H.'s approach, I will discuss her analysis of two poetic texts. The first is from the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*. The newborn god leaves the cave of his mother and (24–38) finds a (feminine-gendered) tortoise, whom 'he fashioned into an *aoidos*' and who he declares will sing beautifully after death. 'These paradoxes', H. says, 'point to a deep and fundamental discomfort' with the gender of words for lyre, song and voice, all feminine, as are the Muses. 'This generates a gendered conflict', and the poem attempts to resolve the tension 'in a particularly sexualized and violent context' (p. 65). Hermes transforms the tortoise from female to male by identifying it as an *aoidos*, yet Hermes is the one speaking. Hermes then degrades the tortoise's sexuality by calling her a *hetairē* ('prostitute') at a symposium where men sing. In lines 39–51 Hermes carries the tortoise into the cave, now using a neuter noun for her, in a parody of wedding ritual and eviscerates her in a symbolic rape. Hermes then receives the epithet *kudimos* (46), which connects him with epic poetry.

Interestingly, H. does not return to the female-gendered performers, the Delian maidens, who in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* are said to *mimeisthai* ('imitate') many voices, thus 'marking out the invention of a new vocabulary to attempt to depict the Delian women's association with poetry, and its relationship to their gender' (p. 63). Nor does she note that an *aoidos* was not just any singer but rather a professional, so to speak. Alcaeus does not call himself an *aoidos*.

H. devotes a chapter to Aristophanes, two of whose comedies, *Frogs* and *Thesmophoriazusae*, have tragedians as main characters. Here *poiētēs* is first used as the regular noun for poet. For *Thesmophoriazusae* H. gives a very good detailed discussion of the puns and ambiguities and word play related to gender that populate the play. She concludes that the gender-fluid Agathon reminds Euripides that a poet must be able to create both female and male characters by representing them with his male body. But Aristophanes is far more satirical than she allows. As H.'s discussion implicitly suggests, the comedy is more about how tragic dramatists futilely attempt to incorporate the alien race of women into their poetic products.

H.'s discussion of Plato is more straightforward in keeping with his expository style. She discusses Diotima in the *Symposium* as well as passages in the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*. In the third section Euripides is the primary author discussed, especially *Trojan Women* and *Medea*, but here H.'s thesis leads to greater problems, which I do not have room to discuss.

The author whom H. most seriously misrepresents is Sappho. Sappho, she says in her opening, however famous, 'had no words with which to talk about who she was, and what she did. She had no name of her own' (p. 1). But Sappho clearly did identify herself as a poet, notably in a fragmentary song in which she seemingly predicts fame for herself after death (58b Neri): '… and under the earth … | having honor (*geras*) as is fitting | they would [marvel at? (me)] as (they do) now when I am on the earth | … clear-voiced, whenever taking up the harp | … I sing (*aeidō*)' (reviewer's trans.). The verb *aeidō* is the last word of the song. Using the verb makes a stronger claim than the writer calling herself by a generic class noun.

In discussing Sappho, H. focuses on the brief fragment 150 (Neri), '… for it is not religiously right (*themis*) in the house (?) of the attendants on the Muses | for a lament-song to take place … that would not be fitting for us'. (The word 'house' does not scan, so is corrupt.) H. distorts its focus by interpreting it as referring to a community of poets anchored by mother-daughter relations. Maximus of Tyre, who quotes the lines, says that, just as Socrates (in Plato's *Crito*) was annoyed by his wife Xanthippe's lamenting him on his deathbed, so Sappho reprimanded her daughter. Maximus' comparisons are superficial, but he clearly read a song of Sappho's in which Sappho suggested a reason linked to her devotion to the Muses for not lamenting her death – a parallel to Socrates' hope in *Crito* and consonant with fr. 58b Neri. The daughter's role, like Xanthippe's, was then not to recognise Sappho's expectation of continued life in some form. Sappho invoked the Muses in multiple fragments, and the other attendants of the Muses, since *moisopolōn* is plural, could be the companions to whom she sang her songs (and plausibly singers themselves). Sappho's self-portrait as a poet-singer was of one who suffered *erōs* and turned it into song, one who was an 'attendant' of both Aphrodite and the Muses. The Hellenistic Nossis linked poetry to female genealogies.

H.'s book is rich in observations and alerts us to pay closer attention to the play of linguistic gender. Yet her thesis controls her interpretations, and her focus on nouns leaves out too much of what creates meaning in literary texts: the effects of rhetorical shaping, genre expectations, occasion, all of which can alter the impact of gendered nouns.

University of Maryland   EVA MARIE STEHLE
                                            estehle@umd.edu