

OLGA BROUMAS: GREEK IN AN AMERICAN VOICE

by

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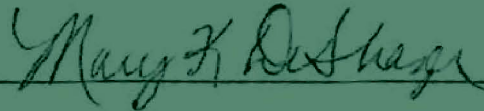
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Art Part, 1981: Oil on 22 Canvases

fig.1

Out of shattered pieces, I believed I could make a whole.

This applied to my art and my life.

Elizabeth Murray

Elizabeth Murray, American (1940-2007). 'Art Part', 1981. Oil on canvas, 187 x 124 inches (292.1 x 315.0 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Purchase: acquired through the generosity of the William T. Kemper Foundation - Commerce Bank, Trustee, 2000.19.A-V. Printed by permission of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

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ABSTRACT

Jill Game Carraway

Olga Broumas: Greek in an American Voice

Thesis under the direction of Mary DeShazer, Ph.D., Professor of English

Olga Broumas is a writer of complex poetry that resists many established conventions of written poetry. She is also the translator from Greek into English of the poetry of Nobel Laureate Odysseas Elytis. Born in Greece, she writes in her second language, English. Her poetry, influenced by her Greek heritage, tends toward the abstract and focuses on themes relevant to women's lives. She is recognized for collaborative composition of poetry with other writers. Unabashedly erotic, one of her well known themes is women's love for each other.

This thesis focuses on the book, Sappho's Gymnasium, collaboratively written by Olga Broumas and T Begley, with special emphasis on the book-length poem "Prayerfields." The thesis reveals continuity and connection with a literary tradition that originates from fragmented remnants of poetry attributed to the Sappho of Greek antiquity. Beginning with a principle drawn from one of Sappho's last collected fragments, Broumas and Begley write of women's ability to acknowledge such difficult issues as the pain of incest and how to cope with the pain from a transformative stance of strength. Inspired by the fragmentary poetic heritage of Sappho, Broumas and Begley employ innovative composition strategies that include word placement, invented words, sentence fragments and varied poetic forms to approximate unspeakable emotion.

Prolegomenon

In the collection of poems, Sappho's Gymnasium by Olga Broumas and her collaborator, T Begley, distinctive textual characteristics, recurring themes and patterns, creative practices, and cultural foundations that support the writers' poetry are revealed. In this collaborative enterprise by two authors who speak as if they are one, the leading creative spirit of this presentation is that of Olga Broumas. Her collaborator, classical Greek Scholar T Begley, is undeniably present as an author of this book of poetry. During their years together as lesbian partners, Begley and Broumas performed readings together, worked jointly on art projects and participated in women's collectives. All Begley's published poetry was produced in tandem with Broumas. The poetry in Sappho's Gymnasium is consistent in tone and style with Broumas's full range of publications. Oblique and imaginative, Broumas's unique text manages to present whole concepts in fragmented lines that abandon much of each page to blank space. Her narrative intentions are balanced by intuitive brilliance, linguistic and historical clarity and a passionate sense of purpose. Her Greek heritage is the curved spine threading language, metaphor, and cultural essence through the vertebra of her poems. A careful examination of this book gives a reader insight into the writing of this cross-millennium poet who wraps her work in a gauze of history tempered with a love of women and their sharp presence in the world. Like American visual artist, Elizabeth Murray, Broumas ties together fragments representing women's lives (fig.1). Broumas's inspiration and her subjects are an international, eclectic mix that she shapes with exquisite language into poems that blend Greek and American imagery and concepts and that celebrate women's strength as a heritage emanating from the time of Sappho.

In the preface to the book, cast as a poem itself, Broumas and Begley name topics, mentors, and methods in the style and technique that lead the reader gently into the deep water of the text. Grounded by the first poem, “Prayerfields,” Sappho’s Gymnasium addresses the disturbing topic of incest, its deep impact on its victims and the sources for power, healing and resolution. Serving as a multi-part postscript to the powerful opening poem are several separately titled sequences of poems whose themes support and compliment the primary work. Each sequence can stand alone with its own coherent meaning. Prior to its publication, “Prayerfields” was announced in the American Poetry Review as a forthcoming book-length poem (Jan/Feb 1992). One of the sequences, “Helen Groves,” was published separately as a chapbook. The last sequence, titled “Sappho’s Gymnasium,” provides the title for the entire collection and is consciously structured to provide closure to the whole work.

This poetry resists the expected. Linear narrative and consistent speaking voice yield to unexpected mergers that expand both text and subject in abstract inclusions. Rusty Morrison, in response to the 2000 publication of Rave, comments,

It is exciting to see the diverse strategies poets use to expose the artificiality of such notions as simple narrative’s ‘manifest destiny’, or the ‘authenticity’ of a ‘constructed’ speaking subject, in their attempts to produce an enlivened, enlivening poetry [...] restoring our sense that “this is happening.” (“Words, I’s, Worlds”)

Although Broumas’s work is complex and often abstract, she tells us we will find nothing new, she only writes what is already known. In a 1980 interview with poet Karla Hammond, Broumas stated, “Nothing I have said is new. If it were new you would read it

and wouldn't recognize it. Insofar as my work appeals it's because one recognizes something one has already thought ... basically I speak what already exists" (42).

Thus begins a progression toward a fusion of the poet's life, of the text, of her critics and mentors, and of her bibliographic imprint in order that these significant fragments can be assembled into a coherent picture of a remarkable poet who understands the value of a fragment to represent the whole. Sappho's Gymnasium presents a series of poetic markers that speak of incest, of healing through the body, and of the intricacies of women's love for each other. It is infused with a spiritual aura in its quest for language that will bridge the gap between perceived meaning and emotional impact.

Alpha: Enter the Poet

An award winning writer, Broumas gained her initial significant recognition in the United States as a poet when she won the Yale Younger Poets Award in 1977 for Beginning With O, her first full-length book of poetry. In 1979 Broumas received a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. She was awarded a 1980 Guggenheim Memorial award for poetry. In addition, it is recorded on her professional website that she received arts grants and awards from Vermont and Oregon, a 1991 Witter Bynner Translation Grant, the 1999 Lambda Poetry Award and most recently the Brandeis University Louis Dembitz Award for Excellence in Teaching. (Brandeis) Stanley Kunitz, known as the Poetry Consultant for the Library of Congress, 1974-76, as the Editor of the Yale Series of Younger Poets for several years in the 70s, and as a Pulitzer Prize winner, among other honors, selected Olga Broumas as the seventy-second winner of the Yale Series of Younger Poets award (Duncan, 141). In the Foreword of Beginning With O, Kunitz pointed out that Broumas, born in Greece in 1949, was the first winner to write in English as an adopted tongue (xiii).

Broumas had an early start to her writing career. Her first published work appears to be a chapbook, Inquietude, published in Greek by Alvin Redman Hellas in Athens in 1967. The author was only eighteen years old at the time. Olga Costia Broumas, born in Syros, Cyclades, Greece on May 6, 1949, was at the beginning of the international odyssey that would take her on circuitous routes to her current status as award winning poet and university professor (Weather, iii).

The basic facts of Broumas's life are listed in several places. They all spit out the same information: chronology of publications to date, lists of awards, date and place of birth, educational progression. Nowhere is there a warm biographical picture of the woman. There is no coherent summary of the formative influences that govern her interactions with the world. Where is the *National Enquirer* for poets! Not given to any autobiographical imperative, she is a poet most likely to be found in the intersections where poetry is made. We can piece together suppositions and responses to some questions: Ms. Broumas, why do you write poetry? Who inspires you? Who are your mentors? What does it mean to be a poet for whom your writing language is your second language? Why is your poetry difficult for many people? Does it trouble you to be called difficult? What are your ideas about the presentation of poetry? How is it you form collaborations for the composition of poetry? Who are you Ms. Broumas? and why?

Because poetry is often a condensed, metaphorical exploration of essential thought, because poetry like any art reflects the time and space of its creation, because poetry depends upon the reader's willing collaboration with the poet who is allowed license with form, structure, language, and vision, the poet as creator who is embodied within the poem is an important person for the reader to know.

We can learn some things directly from Olga Broumas herself. In brief interviews published primarily around the time of award ceremonies, from bibliographical and lexicographical notations accompanying some of her translations, from her comments in forewords and notes of some editions of her books, the shadow of this unique poet gains substance and acquires a nearly tangible heft. A caveat is essential. It may not be

assumed that Broumas speaks directly of her own experience in her poems. We may assume that her knowledge and experience are instrumental in forming the narrative, but this poet lays no claim to confessional poetry or autobiographical story. In a metaphysical leap, she is the poem even if she physically lives another narrative. Broumas once even blurred the distinction between herself and the Sappho of Greek antiquity. In her endnotes for Beginning With O, Broumas speaks of the epigraph at the head of the poem, “Bitterness.” The epigraph attributed there to Sappho reads:

She who loves roses must be patient
and not cry out when she is pierced by thorns.

Sappho (54)

In the note Broumas says,

The epigraph appears in the middle of a page of notes on Sappho. I have been unable to locate it in any of her works. It is possible that I wrote it myself, under her influence, or that it might be from some lyric in the *Greek Anthology*, though here again my efforts to locate it have been unfruitful. At the risk of mysticism, I feel the couplet to be hers, regardless of its actual provenance (74).

Sappho appears again interwoven with Broumas’s inner poet, this time in Sappho’s Gymnasium near the end of the book. That there is fusion here of Sappho and Broumas is evident only by a small end note that says, “Quoted stanza intuited from Sapphic fragment” (185). The quoted stanza reads,

I have a young girl good as blossoming gold
her ephemeral face I have formed of a key
clearer than skylark homelands

Broumas does not reveal the original fragment. When she says that she speaks for the Artemis or the Imogene Knode in herself, when she says that she and Sappho share a voice, when she incorporates meaning into her own poems that relies on the metaphorical content of poems of other authors, she diminishes herself as an individual voice and becomes instead a choral arranger, a coordinator of thought, a human archive.

This is not to say that none of the experiences of the speakers in her poetry are her own. Some are undeniably her events. But whether or not the poem in question contains personal happenings, her emotional investment is empathetically genuine and spiritually true. It is not the role of the poems to provide the reader with a chronology of the poet's life. It is true that her interests, surroundings, cultural interactions with the wider world and its history are intrinsic and essential to her creative outpouring. How she arranges and incorporates these elements into her song is the medium of her unique composition. In a 1980 interview with Karla Hammond, Broumas said,

Multiplicity is one of the basic attributes of our natures: to think, do many things at the same time; the multiple orgasm; many lives possible within one life. When I look at gods, fairy-tale figures, the raped women, the killed women, I feel them as lives I am possibly living, I reveal myself through them. I don't speak for Artemis: I speak for the Artemis in myself. I don't speak for Imogene Knode but for the Imogene Knode in myself who was killed at twenty-five by her husband.

[...]

I tried to deal with the fact that every time I pick up a paper there's a story about a woman who has been beaten, raped, brutalized. What happens to the body of one woman happens to all our consciousness (34).

Broumas speaks of her early life as a poet in one of her few references to her youth and family. In the course of an interview Karla Hammond inquired if Broumas's parents were instrumental in her writing. Broumas replied,

I was generally encouraged and specifically discouraged. It was always fine that I wrote poetry, but it was never fine that at any one given time I was writing a poem. So there was that constant ... Dichotomy, right, between "oh, our daughter writes poems and they're being published, isn't it wonderful" and "why do you have to write a poem now?" I was an only child until I was twelve. My parents' assumption was that my life would be of consequence. It was never explained or articulated to me how I might go about this or what I might expect or anticipate, but every time I started doing something that was not of consequence I was reprimanded. That assumption has been instrumental (33).

Broumas was an extremely precocious child whose toddlerhood includes an amazing literary accomplishment. In the Hammond interview, Broumas mentioned Adrienne Rich as one of the great influences on both her personal and her writing life. In a sudden and unexpected jump, she juxtaposed Jane Eyre as another significant influence when she said, "I spent the entire winter I was four reading Jane Eyre in a Greek translation ... It was my first immersion in literature" (37). Four years old and she is reading 500 pages of the nineteenth century vocabulary of Charlotte Brontë.

Following Broumas's own example with Sappho, I lift a single sentence from Jane Eyre and claim I do not know just where I found it and if I could ever find it again, but in it I see the metaphorical exactness of the sea, its song, and its wildness and I can see the young Olga and the vulnerable Jane linking very darkly though the glass:

Floating on with closed eyes and muffled ears, you neither see the rocks bristling not far off in the bed of the flood, nor hear the breakers boil at their base. But I tell you—and you may mark my words—you will come some day to a craggy pass in the channel, where the whole of life’s stream will be broken up into whirl and tumult, foam and noise: either you will be dashed to atoms on crag points, or lifted up and borne on by some master-wave into a calmer current [...] (281).

Another extraordinary influence on Broumas’s writing life is her translation of three volumes of poetry by the Greek Nobel Laureate poet, Odysseas Elytis. With T Begley as collaborator she also produced a prose translation of the essays in Open Papers. Her translations and her friendship with Elytis gave her a direct bridge to the primary European arts, culture, and literature of the pre- and post-war years when Europe led the Western world in innovation in all the arts. Elytis was a friend of Picasso, Satie, and every writer of note on the Continent. He most likely has exerted the strongest influence on her poetry of any external force. In the Afterword of Eros Eros Eros Broumas said,

I first saw and heard Odysseas Elytis in a public lecture when I was sixteen. My right eye wanders, I see only through the left. For the first and only time in my forty-six years, both eyes focused and I listened transfixed and transported beyond meaning to what the Sufis call ecstasy: to know and experience at once. For two hours I saw two images speak to the *first and second Greece, what is and what could be, Paradise and Hell one matter differing only in the eye of the beholder* (161).

She became a poet. She said of him, “He is the homeland of my nativity, the father of my poems.”(163) From 1986 through 1997, she produced translations that made Elytis accessible to the English speaking world. Elytis, her friend and mentor was greatly moved when he said, “You have given my music”(162). When Broumas was approached in 2000 by Michael Kalafatas to evaluate a poem in Greek by his grandfather about the history of the Greek sponge divers, she was prepared by her experience and bond with Elytis both to spin an exquisite translation and to understand and be true to its position in the long narrative of Greece.

In answer to an interview question from Karla Hammond, Broumas addressed the issues of depth, complexity and language in her poems. She answered first that she envisions “an intelligent feminist audience.” Of herself she adds:

For whatever it’s worth and however I’ve acquired it, I have an extensive vocabulary. For me not to use it would be matronizing – talking down. We are all striving to extend our levels of competence and share the results. [...] To use words that have never been used to describe our lives makes those words ours, provides motivation to learn them,

There’s a difference, though, between complex vocabulary and complexity of syntax or grammar. I try for simple grammatical and syntactical structures. My work is based on dialogue and dialogue gives direct grammatical structures.

You never have to wonder “what does this modify and how does this work?” (37)

Two more statements in this interview reveal how Broumas thinks about her work:

[...] It's easy for me to translate what I know about arranging color masses on paper to create a certain emotional movement of the eye to arranging pauses and stanzas. I see the poem on the page really as notation for the voice.

[.....]

I write three lines and throw two and half out and write two more and throw the whole thing out and start over again. I go back the next day and make a few small changes or become more aware of a central pattern and emphasize it. In both cases, the way the poem looks on the page is very, very important to me (41).

That Broumas speaks emphatically of the physical shape and presence of a poem on the page casts clarity on the reasons she shapes a line, pushes a word outside the margin or splits it into parts unexpectedly as she did with the word 'historical' in the first page of "Proem." The visual impact of the six word, one line stanza that opens this book,

faithful the present I see you (5)

is a stark invocation that the reader grasps intuitively. This opening thought is essential to all the words that are to follow; it states a primary principle concerning time so that all events in Sappho's Gymnasium must be part of or functionally relevant in narrative impact to the present. Placement, shape, text and the physical presence of an entire sheet of white space as a showcase, all work together to underscore the meanings in the page. In the Vita of her MFA Thesis, Broumas lists a degree in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania in 1970. Form, structure, and aesthetic, vital to that study, manifest themselves also in the shape of her poems. Broumas says she tries for simple grammatical and syntactical structures. It may be that Broumas's ideas on simplicity and

clarity require a careful and discerning eye. Physical, literary, grammatical, musical, visual, spiritual and emotional: her poetry is crafted around vision that includes every element available to her that will allow her to project meaning even when words alone are not enough.

Beta: Begin the Proem

Sappho's Gymnasium, a volume of poetry by Olga Broumas and T Begley, bodyprints the blended voices of two poets who have merged their lyrical selves through the creative process. They list themselves on the title page as the authors of this book. Nowhere in this collection of poems is there any indication of a division of the work, a statement that one might write of elements of earth while the other might treat the sky, or that one would write beginnings and the other would do endings. There is no public dedication of the poems from one to the other, nor any explanation of the method of collaboration. By this means the authors detach the individual as creator from the presentation of the poems. In this age of copyright laws that define, protect, and legitimize the ownership of intellectual property, in a culture that teaches individualism and survival of the fittest as foundational values, what Broumas and Begley do is radical and seditious. The primary sanctioned merging of individuals in western culture is located in heterosexual marriage, defined by religion and enforced by the state:

A	α	Alpha	a
B	β	Beta	b
Γ	γ	Gamma	g
Δ	δ	Delta	d
E	ε	Epsilon	e
Z	ζ	Zeta	z
H	η	Eta	h
Θ	θ	Theta	th
I	ι	Iota	i
K	κ	Kappa	k
Λ	λ	Lambda	l
M	μ	Mu	m
N	ν	Nu	n
Ξ	ξ	Xi	x
O	ο	Omicron	o
Π	π	Pi	p
P	ρ	Rho	r
Σ	σ	Sigma	s
T	τ	Tau	t
Υ	υ	Upsilon	u
Φ	φ	Phi	ph
X	χ	Chi	ch
Ψ	ψ	Psi	ps
Ω	ω	Omega	o

Greek Alphabet fig.2

... Have

ye not read, that he which made them at the

beginning made them male and female,

and said, for this cause shall a man leave

father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife:
and they twain shall be one flesh?

Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh (Matt. 19: 4-6).

The Christian text of Jesus's remarks reflects current social and political practice in the United States that Broumas and Begley subvert by their lesbian juncture as they establish a radical agenda of unsanctionable merger, and also by their identity blending which exceeds common cultural patterns.

The introduction to this collection of poems is a net cast into a river of connections. It is the "Proem." Formally defined, a proem is an introductory discourse or a preface. As such, it ordinarily prepares the reader to understand and appreciate the work to follow. Almost every introduction to a book I have read was written in prose. Broumas and Begley push beyond traditional models to turn their introduction into a mind-setter that establishes links for the reader with history and with the present. The first cue is their use of the term *proem*. Derived from Middle English, and with further definition, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, from Old French that connects the word to the lays of medieval traveling minstrels, *proem* impacts Sappho's Gymnasium by meaning, by etymological roots, and also by the look and sound of the word. I believe it is no mere coincidence that the first full section of poems in the book is named "Prayerfields." "Proem" ties the sound of prayer and of preface to the word, "poem," and forms the first direct link between this initial piece and all that is to follow.

"Proem" itself begins with lines of verse from the original Sappho in Greek coupled with Broumas's English translation: "Tears unbecome the house of poets (vii)."

Another translation of this line by Mary Barnard shows it to be an admonition by Sappho to her daughter, Cleis, and to be arranged in order as the ninety-ninth or next-to last fragment of Sappho's verifiable collection of verse.

Must I remind you, Cleis,
 That sounds of grief
 are unbecoming in
 a poet's household?
 and that they are not
 suitable in ours? (99)

The end of Sappho's collected work is the beginning of Sappho's Gymnasium. The poets' houses are linked across the millenniums with continuity of purpose, resolve, and spirit. Since tears and helpless grief are not to be accepted, the resolution of difficult issues must be found in some other time, through some other method and by some other poet. Broumas and Begley forge the connection. They take Sappho's injunction literally when they write of incest and other difficult issues from a position of power rather than grief or lamentation. They may acknowledge grief or fear, but that is not the resolution of this book of poetry. Indeed, resolution may be an unidentifiable function for this book. Morrison suggests Broumas is a poet who refuses the limitations of "[...] boundaries, not only of simple recounted narrative, but also of the many other systemic confinements which we often accept without scrutiny --- be they personal, societal, grammatical" (np). While incest is a serious topic in "Prayerfields," it is treated in the fragmented mode associated with Sappho. Although there may be gaps in syntax, understanding, even when it is not plainly stated, flows across the chasms.

If the term *stanza* can be applied to the poetic and intellectual organization of “Proem,” the first fourteen lines of the piece constitute a moving paean to the survival and triumph of women over trauma and oppression. Paeans, of course, hark back to the formal songs of Hellenic antiquity; fourteen line arrangements of verse, even without the syllabic and rhyming conventions, suggest kinship with the sonnet. The interweaving of Greek and English formats, whether intuitive or deliberate, presages the global blend that is a hall-mark of Broumas’s poetry. The connection of Sappho, famous lesbian poet of antiquity, and the term, *gymnasium*, strikes further global notes. Back to the Oxford English Dictionary, we find *gymnasium* described as a school in Germany and in other parts of the Continent where students are prepared for higher education in universities. This coincides with a common belief that the Isle of Lesbos was the site where Sappho conducted a kind of training or finishing school for women. By extension, I think Broumas and Begley are indicating their poems will offer some kind of education or intellectual progression.

As in their use of *proem*, I believe these two poets are attuned to the nuances of the words they choose and that they allow the words to carry with them multiple meanings and connotations. They address further meaning of *gymnasium* by breaking out its roots and forms. *Gymn*, they point out is “nude, trained, exposed, athletic, flexible,” while in a stunning placement of the word “practice” they confer the possibility of unmodified action that can take any form and can bend its meaning to any moment. They expand *Gymn* to *Gymnasteon*. This is a word they have coined and given linguistic attributes. In sound it could be an invented imperative case. Indeed, they call it imperative and link its appearance to the earlier manifestation of “tears unbecoming.”

These poets slip back and forth through language and form. It is obvious that they will not be controlled by the rules and limitations of language or conventional forms. If tears are unbecoming and if the poems yet to be read will include strong, exposed or naked elements, they may also be viewed through an exalted and emotional lens. The reader is warned of powerful topics:

Incest animal

you stop to give me a ride

The scope of the work is laid out:

Ink where to care, founder of joy: ancestral histori-

cal, female only (vii)

These poems the authors claim for the benefit of women. The lines indicate they may use phrases to invoke thought rather than to offer explanations. They will use fragments or unfinished statements that leave meaning to be evolved in the mind of the reader. The end-line break in *historical* is a visual indicator of the ruptures and discontinuities in the long passages of women's history. The lines also carry with them emotional impact – in this case a strong sense of the joy that arises from the literary traditions and shared history of women, and the urgency and stability of ink and permanence. Thus the method for preservation of women's history is proclaimed in a triumphant flourish in this fourteenth line of "Proem."

The next section of "Proem" represents a dramatic shift in style, format and visual impact. Two compact blocks of prose, one each from Odysseas Elytis and Janet Hart, act

as “found poems,” serendipitous blocks of prose that rise like cream, unintended poems skimmed from the flow of language and imagery. The lines from Elytis and Hart begin a progression of recognitions of writers who form a panel of muses, a kind of literary lineage from whom Broumas and Begley draw instruction and inspiration. The first two selections are followed by lines quoted from Adrienne Rich, Roland Barthes, and W. S. Merwin. The author-muse works are interspersed with lines of poetry written by Broumas and Begley in a technique that models their non-linear presentation of the complications and connections that flesh out the body of Sappho’s Gymnasium. Each of these modern muses is selected for special properties and values that support the global framework of this book of poetry. A reader who wishes to enter fully into the narrative needs to consider the quoted words as well as the extended influence of these inspirational sources.

Janet Hart, the first named forbear, portrays the idea of women as proponents of radical deeds. For writers to consciously name women’s history as the topic of discourse is a powerful political act. Women’s history has been subsumed in the male patriarchal text. Those who chip it away from the male stone are not always appreciated in mainstream institutions, nor indeed do those sculptors of women’s past always want a place in those institutions. Olga Broumas herself, in a narrative poem “Field,” included in her book Perpetua, wrote of refusing to work for a firm after it was acquired by an institution affiliated with the military (74). Broumas and Begley, however, are not opposed to militant women who demand, who create, who find and recover their space that has been historically concealed in the world’s record of the past. They themselves perform a bold tactical maneuver with the sudden format shift in “Proem” to incorporate

the block of prose from Women in the Greek Resistance by Janet Hart. Hart quotes a medley of women's voices from the long, devastating Greek Civil War that was interwoven with and continued beyond World War II. The voices quoted reveal spirited resilience even in the deadly chaos of armed conflict:

“I threw my whole self into psychagogia. I danced,
I sang, I was in plays. I made up my mind and so did
a lot of the younger girls. I was 16. You tried to give
something, a sweet note, to cheer the rest of the camp.
We paid in beatings and solitary. We never put the
banner down. Released from solitary, start singing,
then solitary again. In and out. Solitary and singing.”
Plousia L., Ikaria, Chios, Trikeri, Makronisos island
camps, 1947-52; Janet Hart, *Women in the Green
Resistance*.

Psychagogia: soul rearing (viii)

Broumas and Begley tap the Greek experience through historical illustration, the testimony of real women, and the startling use of a word, psychagogia, that could almost pass for familiar English terminology. Although the Oxford English Dictionary supports the poem's own precise definition, “soul rearing,” by offering the meanings “Influencing or leading the mind or soul” and “persuasive,” it also offers a rare interpretation based on the Greek origin of the word, “Conjuring up or evoking the spirits of the dead.” Continuing the Greek connection is the dictionary's illustrative quotation:

“In the play of the ‘Choëphoræ’ [Agamemnon's] royal shade, powerful in the realm of death, is wrought upon by the long psychagogic odes to succour his avengers.” While it may not be necessary for a reader to examine every word in Sappho’s Gymnasium for extended and hidden meaning, the poem’s text is verified and substantiated in its complexity and truthfulness and bears well scrutiny through external sources. In this instance, *Psychagogia* embodies the essence of Broumas and Begley’s work. Precise, loaded with connotation, abstract by virtue of its placement in the line, concrete in meaning, linked historically with Greek references, and exuding spirit that underscores the important focus on women’s history, it is a word for all seasons.

In this moving description of the rigors of imprisonment, Broumas and Begley highlight a fundamental element of the character and history of Greek women. Young as the victims are in this stanza of “Proem,” they illustrate solidarity, collaboration, perseverance and dedicated sense of purpose. According to Michael Kalafatas there is a tradition of women’s protests that has profoundly affected the destiny of modern Greece.

He states:

Women’s protests, sometimes violent, took place on Symi, Kalymnos, and Kastellorizo; they occurred under the Turkish and Italian occupations, and, in the case of Kalymnos, after Dodecanese union with Greece in 1948. In other words there is a continuity that suggests a tradition of women’s protests (58).

That this continuity has a presence concurrent with the centuries of Greek history is illustrated by Aristophanes’ famous *Lysistrata* who led the women of Greece in resistance to the Peloponnesian War. *Lysistrata* was certainly a literary forbear of the women of the

Greek resistance and of the collaborators who penned the “Proem” of Sappho’s Gymnasium.

The next writer presented in this unique introduction is Odysseas Elytis who is quoted in the context of the power embedded in writing:

... in unequal battle the whole human comes
 awake. Also the poet. The idea of a book held me as
 icons hold others. I saw it and turned its pages. The
 poems I had not written and would have wanted to
 write filled its pages with their external shape. I had
 but to ‘fill it’ as you fill a row of empty glasses and,
 immediately, what power, what freedom, what disdain
 toward bombs and death it gave me.

That which disempowers you is unfit for your
 song.

- *The second great Lesbian*, Odysseas Elytis (viii)

Broumas and Begley here reveal their intent to join the power of poetry with women’s strength as they address issues that have often disempowered women. A poet must have strength in order to write powerful poetry. It is a direct and forceful statement and impels a poet to resistance of whatever would undermine the poetic voice. In practical terms, if the poet is a woman, she should resist grammar and syntax that favor the male persona. “He” is not a universal pronoun. If the poet is a woman, she should resist elevating a father to a position of honor if he commits incest. If the poet is a woman, she must resist

perpetuating religious tradition when that tradition devalues a woman. The unspoken corollary requires the poet, if the poet is a woman, to examine language, metaphor, artistic intent, all social, sexual, political, and institutional models for restrictions that devalue women and by extension, their poetry. This process of evaluation is demonstrated throughout "Proem." Broumas and Begley demonstrate it when they excerpt from Elytis the concept of creativity and writing as a fundamental source of power. This concept does not embed a gender war. It does not call into question the motives of men, nor does it call for men to change systems. It calls for poets to be responsible and strong. There is an echo of Sappho's demand for the dismissal of tears in Elytis's call for poetry that will not erode the poet's power. There is an assumption of power in the poet's voice. The gender of the poet is not the question, only the text.

Broumas and Begley lopotiry ro

appreciates the debt later generations owe to trail-blazers and ground-breakers such as Adrienne Rich. Broumas said, “If I have been influenced by anyone it’s been Adrienne Rich”(Hammond, 37). The issue of trust, however, bleeds over into the nature of collaboration and represents a fundamental difference in viewpoints on philosophy and creative process between Rich and Broumas and Begley. It is here that the united pair of authors introduce the collaboration that creates Sappho’s Gymnasium:

Trust so broad we cash chromosomes
 praising floor carried into fields a synonym of life
 I shall be all with her [...]

These two poets illustrate throughout the book the trust that allows them to speak with one voice.

In this seamless catalog of “Proem” the introduction of themes to be examined continues with mention of French essayist, literary theorist, and semiological scholar, Roland Barthes. From Barthes, the authors select a single line to illuminate their scrutiny of the powerful impact embedded in language:

Any completed utterance runs the risk of being
 ideological (ix)

Broumas and Begley embrace this statement. In their poetic response, the significance of language is elevated and the reader is instructed that these writers are aware of the dangers concealed in language. Like *Gymnasteon* in the sixth line of “Proem,” they create yet another word, *Gymnosophist*. This second word is also presented as an imperative. The imperative case is one of command, of taking control, of application of power. In the case of *Gymnosophist*, the Greek roots combine to describe a trained, wise

teacher engaged, according to the OED, in communication. Drilling a little deeper into the root of *sophist*, the search leads to *Sophia*, Divine Wisdom. Although Sophia had the misfortune to become a Christian saint through horrific martyrdom, she is part of a much earlier tradition hinted at by the appropriation of her name for wisdom. Broumas and Begley therefore are able to add a whisper from ancient history to include yet another woman to the list of those whom Erasmus referred to as “teachers of wisdom and eloquence, and the name of Sophistes was had in honour and price.” These linguistic inventions are bold assumptions of power that exceed the limitations of ordinary linguistic structure. In their conjoined voice Broumas and Begley state explicitly that they reject restraints of form, vocabulary, and any other restrictive linguistic barrier when they respond to Barthes in their own interspersed lines of poetry:

Gymnosophist imperative: antonym clutter.

Grief under anger, doxa interrupts praise;

constant grief: just depression.

Narrative: doxa: thought police: recorded:

grammar

Aphrodytian celebrants: therapaenidae: from

ther: heat-summer-harvest and *poio*: god-poet-creator

Pupil only to you

fleece of dew

The term *Doxa* identifies the dialogue in which Barthes studied the semiotics of language, that is the signs and symbols or words weighted with embedded meaning and

therefore not open to fresh communication. Doxa is a concept which originated with the ancient Greek philosophers. Anne Herschberg-Pierrot, in her article, “Barthes and Doxa,” explains the concept:

he makes the connection between the Aristotelian meaning of the probable [...] and the modern transformation of doxa in the new mass culture: he shows doxa as an enunciative force with an insidious power, insinuating itself into everyday speech, exerting the imperious strength of well-established accepted ideas, like a fantasy that one cannot shake off (440).

Broumas and Begley here, by their aversion to the idea of thought police, intimate their use of language will be attentive to its problems. Thought police, made famous in George Orwell's 1984 is now a term in the OED synonymous with the idea of suppression of thought. Every waitress, aviatrix, actress, executrix, female college freshman, farmerette, preacheress or wife of a man, can testify to disparities in rewards and recognitions between men and women who perform the same functions. Labels cast as gendered nouns help simplify the application of discrimination. There are plenty of linguistic problems that merit the concern of Broumas and Begley. Indeed, they illustrate their approach to language problems in the next lines of Greek-flavored reference to Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty and object of ancient celebrations of fertility and harvest. They adapt words to fill the requirements of the concept and even parse one of their creations to show the origins of its meanings, origins that celebrate the famous goddess of love in the time of harvest and set the poets in the middle of a trinity, “[...]god-poet-creator” (ix). Power flows between god and the poet with a suggestion of spiritual equality in linear format. There is room in that configuration for collaboration

and creation. That the poets are assuming an active creative role in the process is confirmed with the lines,

Pupil only to you
fleece of dew. (ix)

The pupil, who is the only clearly identified person in this couplet, is endowed with the power of selection. The “you,” who can be almost anyone in the role of mentor-teacher, functions at the pleasure of the pupil, which is made clear with the word “only.” The pupil will not be ruled in her choice of teacher. The grammatical syntax in the two lines above, raises the question of the identity of “you.” *You* is indefinite in number and gender and may refer to one or many unidentified teachers. The object of the lesson, the fleece of dew, the noble quest, provides an ambiguous allusion that suggests links to two famous tales: the biblical narrative of Gideon in Judges and the mythical tales of the sea journey taken by Jason in search of the golden fleece shorn from a magical ram (Hamilton, 116).

The Biblical fleece is found in *Judges* 6:37 when Gideon and God engage in some high-level negotiations. God wants Gideon to tear down the local altar to Baal. In exchange he offers Gideon rule over the Israelites and disbandment and destruction of their enemy, the Midianites. Gideon asks God for proof of his power, goodwill and intentions. On the threshing floor, which also happens to be a historical site of Aphroditian harvest celebrations, Gideon tosses a fleece and challenges God to prove his power. He asks God to cause a heavy dew to fall upon the fleece and not upon the ground beside it, and then, the next day, for the dew to fall upon the earthen threshing floor while the fleece remains dry. This negotiated pact shifted the balance of existing

power in Israel's favor, elevated a country in status because of the conferral of divine favor. These actions mirror the force of divine intervention in the saga of Jason's quest for the golden fleece. One significant difference between these two stories is divine gender since Jason won his glory and kingdom with the aid of goddesses, thus validating a powerful link from antiquity in which goddesses held divine power.

Broumas and Begley use a single image of only three words, "fleece of dew," to open and join the divine aura of two spiritual cultures, Greek mythology and Christian scripture. Both stories include terrible tales of violence and war, of goals achieved with divine assistance, of the complexities of goals, death, and endings. The undefined teacher to whom the poets allude must guide the pupil through immeasurable difficulty. The space where the instruction begins has already been hallowed by Aphrodite. The voice of Sappho set the song in motion, and poets Broumas and Begley are bound by their own selection of mentors and topics to write women's history with the permanence of ink in an empowering voice.

That the voice is inextricably blended from at least two poets, and that the voice promises a conclusion rich in satisfaction is illustrated by the poets' quotation of Merwin's stanzas that speak of joy, the bond of language, and deep intimacy:

"Late I came
to the joy of this
whatever I have is yours

—

[...]

“We stand in line
 taking up
 one space
 —
 “We tell each other of a language
 and it breathes
 between us
 —
 [...]

Each of us is one
 side of the rain
 we have only one shadow”

— *The second great Psapphian*, W.S. Merwin (x – xi)

The notes to Sappho’s *Gymnasium* refer to *Psapphian* to define it as a Sapphic spelling (185). They have completely appropriated and folded Merwin into the same idea of Lesbian identity as Elytis – first and forever, a poet. It is also a tribute to both Elytis and Merwin that the women laud these men with a term they treat with honor. Broumas and Begley resist boundaries created by naming conventions that restrict and impede meaning and freedom. It is an act of linguistic resistance when the pair include Elytis and Merwin in the lesbian fold. They allow Merwin to explain the nature of a collaboration which can be no closer whatever than to be both sides of the rain.

Through the poets’ vision in “Proem,” the reader is forewarned and prepared for the subsequent text of Sappho’s *Gymnasium*. It remains only for the reader to become

the willing pupil to enter this school, this gymnasium, and become the second essential element of the poem, the being who receives it in the spirit in which it is offered. In “Proem” it is clearly stated that incest is a topic that will be included. It is the first topic named and as such can be expected to be one of the centers of the complex dialogues in the book. Followed by reference to women in the traumatic vise of war and battle, trauma and resistance are announced as subjects. In whatever discourse evolves concerning these topics, the route to it will be marked by language and preserved in narrative for all who seek the lessons offered in Sappho’s gymnasium.

Gamma: In Prayerfields

How can one make a poem of a topic as conflicted as incest? It is fraught with taboo, menace, pain, and intimations of powerless mortality. If Broumas and Begley are to adhere to Sappho's dictum that tears do not belong to the house of poets, and if they embrace the spirit of Odysseas Elytis and his advice to avoid that which disempowers you, then the poets must find a way to speak the unspeakable with an outcome that supports the vision of a woman of power. Claudia Ingram, University of Redlands English professor, suggests that testimony and witnessing provide a method for such communication. She wrote that Shoshana Felman, Professor of Comparative Literature and French at Emory University who is also known for her work in psychoanalysis, trauma and testimony, names testimony as a signal 20th Century discursive mode. Ingram clarifies Felman's ideas:

As she describes it, testimony, or bearing witness, is a speech act necessitated when events exceed or shatter the frameworks within which we ordinarily make meaning. The witness must speak before she can know the meaning of her utterance; her testimony precedes and enables construction of the very contexts that will determine its meaning. To the extent that poetic language, too, drifts beyond the structures that fix and safeguard meaning, poetry figures testimony's unsheltered quality. Poetic language transgresses linguistic frameworks, and while a poem's utterance may imply a reassuring narrative or dramatic frame, such a frame must be generated from the utterance itself – it is not given prior to the poem's moment. On the other hand, since poetic language

invites a reading, it also figures the transferential relationship that [...] enables new possibilities of meaning to emerge (105).

Testimony as a way of generating knowledge, reaching beyond limitations of culture and language to speak the unspeakable, is an apt vehicle for the projection of the diaspora that is incest, which is dispersed through the body, the psyche, the lives of all connected with the fact and the embedded soul of the affected. Broumas and Begley must translate a difficult topic into a language of praise tempered with strength since they have clearly stated in “Proem,”

Grief under anger, doxa interrupts praise (ix)

and

“That which disempowers you is unfit for your song.” (viii)

This apparent conflict between intent and subject requires exploration based at least in part on the illumination of the topic through some form of testimony.

The first line of “Prayerfields” is boldly presented as a one line stanza:

faithful the present I see you (5)

History provides codes traditionally examined for an understanding of things based on their association with the past. Broumas and Begley discard history as the source for answers to the problems and questions raised by incest. History is ordinarily a patriarchally weighted narrative of the past that ignores many issues significant to women. Whatever story history may hold, the poets declare they will be faithful to the unexplored present. While they do not claim to erase history and the chain of events it

holds, which includes the actual events of the incest, they overrule the power of history to shape the present and to create the future. The story tellers find in the power of the present a venue that is new, clean and untainted with things that disempowered their song.

In the next stanza all things new and clean are evoked. This stanza is an invocation to beginnings. Light stands alone on the first line. Its position is as powerful as the first act of God in Genesis 1:3, “Let there be light: and there was light.” In this beginning are stanzas held together by the imagery of light and things ruled by light.

light

that will never get depressed awake

at the end of yourself as to the meaning of

oxygen saturation now go

and clean the skin while staining the bride’s hand (6)

In a strange mix of metaphorical light and modern medical terminology, oxygen saturation is a medical test performed by a light clipped to a finger. The light shining through the skin measures the amount of oxygen in the blood. Life itself depends upon enough oxygen circulating in the blood throughout the body to nourish the internal organs. In an unmoderated flow of language, the poets move from elemental origins of life itself to the change of personal status in which a bride is prepared for marriage in an Islamic hand painting ritual common in South Asia and North Africa. The bride, the groom, and all the guests receive patterns painted in henna on the skin as part of the preparation for the ceremony (Cartwright, 4). The brevity of the stanza does not impede

the expansion of its vision. Two significant spiritual systems, Christianity and Islam, as well as the origin of life and the status of a woman are held up for view. The language, itself spare, is notable for things omitted. No patriarchal deity is named, no proscriptions or methods of worship are presented. Creation itself is clean. The first figure in this landscape is a woman who exists in a location defined only by light, air, and the body. In “Proem,” the poets claim, “Narrative comforts you skim it.” The place where the woman is found is honed to essentials, yet it offers a connection to a familiar narrative. Their utterances are clearly not complete, so they run no risk of ignoring Roland Barthes’s advice against the ideological; thus doxa does not stand in the way of praise (ix). Not only are Broumas and Begley faithful to the present, they are carefully adhering to the syllabus they defined for Sappho’s gymnasium and to the dictum that “Tears unbecome the house of poets.”

Each brief stanza of “Prayerfields” delivers a coded message. A ruin eight miles along a trail hints of an unspoken past. Since it is a ruin, there appears little need to examine it. It is a stanza with a trail of its own “pleated flight” where markers are words:

the ruin is eight miles by trail
 whose pleated flight and song
 of unimagined existence and myself
 innocent of such twistings
 the young man’s eyes remained serene
 and the white shift
 strength of sheeting comfort

and the wise to die for a person pale
 fields in whose glorying they
 cover their breasts at the place where the girls
 were bathing. (7)

The ruin and its trail, which the pleated flight suggests are rugged and difficult, seem far away in time, distance, and impact. Like foreshadowing in Jane Eyre, the mention of the trail suggests a passing moment of uneasiness that is quickly bypassed and overshadowed by the presence of the serene young man dressed in white. Another wrinkle in the peaceful scene is the suggestion of death, perhaps martyrdom, since the death may be sacrificial on behalf of some other person. The poets choose not to name the man who is clearly associated with a scene of almost divine spirituality. The series of spiritual images fills the stanza: song, unimagined existence, innocent presence, white sheeting, comfort, pale fields, glorying, and girls bathing. The language is tender in the moment. These are the prayerfields themselves where the pale fields speak of ripe harvest ready for a threshing floor such as the one alluded to in "Proem." In flashback again to the proem, the reader remembers the promise and the trust between the poets:

I shall be all with her and protect her
 from any harm and shall defend her in the midst
 of peace
 call inexplicable ex spirit mental (ix)

There is a tension in this idyllic picture provoked by hints of difficult paths, death, and the need for protection even in a peaceful place.

The reader must turn the page and move to a new stanza to acknowledge what is already known, the man's identity. Christ is visible, translucent with desert light and the memory of shepherds under the holy night of stars. The poets have tapped the power associated with Christianity with which to overlay the prayerfields. They have not designated an object of worship. They note "...some indirect communication with/ Christ in the desert..." The strength to protect and defend the innocent is an appropriation of power by association and the power is vested in the poets. Tension estaTaan aT05roly in

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[...] trauma exceeds the categories that its sufferers use to make sense of their ordinary experience. Thus the traumatic event seems to have taken place outside the parameters of ‘normal’ reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time; its sufferers find themselves unable to assimilate it into the narrative of their lives(106).

The next stanza of “Prayerfields” fits this paradigm as the speaker calls up the familiar, the understandable. Events, physical surroundings, even the identity of the speaker are questionable in these lines where incest is treated with emotional restraint. The poets are able to maintain the distance required for the writers to avoid autobiographical intensity because of their linguistic manipulation of the identity of the speaker. Even though they freely use the first person, ‘I’ at times is the voice of the poet, at others the voice of the victim or even the fused voice of all concerned. Rusty Morrison comments that Broumas and Begley present a good deal more than the recollection of experience.

Movement along expected lines of meaning is disrupted as syntactic relationships between words are opened, explored. In this context, all structural systems, be they social, sexual, religious, are ripe to be questioned (np).

In the lines below, the ambiguity of the narrator, the “you”, and the “I” support Morrison’s remarks as well as illustrate the application of Broumas’s belief in the communal consciousness shared by women:

in the sensible world you say

that tree is getting warm

it is like opening a door

the kin the kindred fuses

a channel for grace

oh I remember that wall

was hard (11)

The poet moves from the “elsewhere” that offers no protection for a young daughter, to look for a place that can be understood, a sensible world. In a sensible world warmth exists, doors open, kin join in the closeness that approximates grace; it is possible to recall a fact from a traumatic moment and believe in the memory, both physical and emotional of a hard wall. It is a starting place for the marriage of memory and language.

Ingram says Felman argues that the trauma which the victim lacks narrative power to describe may still be spoken in an act of bearing witness. The process will at first be voiced in drifting fragments and must have a willing listener who can demonstrate through the act of hearing the testimony that the bond between speaker and listener remains strong and is not broken by the traumatic utterance. This sharing becomes a collaborative speech act (106-107). Ingram further suggests that Felman believes the language and syntax of poetry can emulate this movement toward assimilation and understanding of the trauma in much the same way as testimony in the formal sense. “Prayerfields,” she claims, is an example of a poetic progression toward speaking and understanding trauma. Ingram builds upon Felman’s analysis of testimony to discuss Sappho’s Gymnasium:

The cycle calls attention to itself as a composition of fragments, its individual poems are printed on separate pages looking small by comparison to the space

they do not fill. In themselves the fragments resist interpretation. Each is a confluence of phrases, sometimes governed by syntax and sometimes not, capital letters and punctuation are missing. [...] Moreover, individual poems do not provide sufficient thematic context to allow the reader to name the tenor of their metaphors. In other words, while it appears that language is being used metaphorically, the 'literal' meaning of the metaphors is, from within the individual poems, undecidable (107).

While Ingram's article forms one of the best current critical commentaries available on Sappho's Gymnasium and introduces the nuances of testimony and witnessing into the dialogue, her statement that the individual poems are "undecidable" reduces the poet's language and syntax to something akin to idioglossia or dyslalia in which a person misconstrues the sounds of speech to the extent that speech acts like an invented language.

I believe the choice the poets made to use little or no punctuation is a deliberate dismissal of rules and boundaries embedded in language that distort meaning when that meaning is located primarily in the body. Anne Zavalkoff discusses the limitations of written language in a comparison of works by David Abram and Mary Daly, both scholars who study problems that arise from these limitations:

While both maintain that communicative abilities are shared by all entities within the living world, they also both warn against the possibly life-draining effects of some forms of human language. Abram claims that phonetic writing is at the root of literate societies' failures to participate fully in nature. "In Western civilization, language seems to deny or deaden life, promoting a massive distrust of sensorial

experience." According to Daly, it is the effect of patriarchy which severs both linguistic and human connections to the cosmos, dulling inspiration and sensory experience. In the Foreground, "words have become mere noises echoing each other in the fathers' flatland" (1984, 94). As a result of this verbicide and "the sensory deprivation and the anti-creative imposed passivity of the State of Boredom . . . nature . . . seem[s] boring" (128-129).

Broumas and Begley are aware of the constraints imposed by language and the drawbacks encountered when they write of sensory details, of the uncoded portrayals of women's sexual engagement with each other, and in metaphorical experiments to break language barriers. I concur that I find some of the poetry in Sappho's Gymnasium difficult to read. The stanzas in "Prayerfields" are constructed as meaningful expressions, in some cases, of the unexpressable. For example, the pain that erupts in the next stanza is measured in terms of the Holocaust:

from the first hours of
imprisonment I know that murderers exist (14)

Broumas and Begley gloss this stanza in the end notes with reference to Primo Levi, the survivor who speaks these lines. Any reference to the Holocaust invokes collective knowledge of one of the twentieth century's widest known human tragedies. It resides in global discourse as a powerful linguistic symbol of the darkest moments of horror in the human soul. The language expressed in this poem encompasses the emotional imprint of incest on its survivor. The impact of this tactic is strengthened in the same manner that the poets combined Christian imagery with the description of the prayerfields to heighten

the impression of secular power. The association of the holocaust with the incest victim's plight illustrates the scope and depth of the trauma the victim experiences.

The next stanzas of "Prayerfields" produce an outpouring of betrayal, fear and confusion in a swath of overt physical imagery resonating from the incestuous event. The small victim needs to make sense. What icon draws her for enlightenment or comfort? what rationale can be applied?

you tender polishing the body if we're not
 too scared in the half presence of god we are able
 to hear
 in the background of the small picture
 her cry of light whose name was pronounced
 with particular tenderness he goes
 out onto the ice finite and helpless in return his soft
 parts ventral know to die

This stanza projects a critical scene, a scene too horrifying for literal description.

The power of the offending parent surfaces in the half presence of God. This image can be associated with the phrase, "god the father." The father who handles his child incestuously must be stripped away from god as a man who disempowers his child. God is then left as a deity bereft of full presence. This stanza shows how skilled Broumas and Begley are at representing the blending and shifting of voice. "We" could represent Broumas and Begley in the victim as Broumas once identified herself with Imogene Knode. At the same time, "We" could represent the collective consciousness of all women joined in concern. This roving voice is the place where the aurora must be found

if empowerment and strength are to be summoned into this narrative. In digetic mode, like art that presents the picture-within-a-picture, the cry of light comes from the background of a small picture. Fragmented narration, an external speaker, layers of visual and virtual reality are splintered in the aftermath of an incestuous sexual event. The voices are fragmented, but the “we” who are able to hear part of the event are witnesses, essential if testimony should occur. A narrator who is not an active agent of the events in this scene is speaking in the voice of the unidentified “we.” The world presented is fragmented into disparate parts. In one, there is a cry of light; in another there is a man detumescent after sex. There is an active confusion of tenderness, spirituality, and wrongdoing that reaches an ending point in this act metaphorically expressed when the ventral parts soften and die. Still in the landscape is the promise expressed in “Proem,”

grace is rendering
my old self unchanged (vii)

To fulfill the intent expressed in “Proem,” the victim must recover her undamaged self and find in it her undamaged soul:

oppressing witness by innocence
birdsong in fist undressing (vii)

It is clear that the victim is innocent and bears no blame for her trauma. In a compelling image, the hand, apparently the victim’s hand, clutches a most intangible object, one that expresses the essence of bird, its song. Undressing is a dislocated term that could apply to the victim, the song, or even the fist. In one mode, undressing could apply to the removal of bandages. In another mode the act of undressing peels a subject down to a naked state, the same state in which a person enters the world, a state of innocence.

One by one the forty-nine stanzas of “Prayerfields” converge across the nearly empty pages through islands of the unspeakable, past phallic birds and tender birds, in stark declarations of images of blood and light, and always on the recurring trail to the ruin that represents the injured site in herself that the daughter needs to transcend in order to find her strength. The poem’s imagery carries the weight of the transformative speech that Ingram identified as the testimony central to this poem. In particular, Ingram keys in on a disturbing stanza:

he is crying
her fatty throat as she swims out
in the open sea he moves
a breathy skin sugar bag sugar bag (26)

Ingram says of these lines, “In common with many of the fragments in “Prayerfields.” this poem [...] is written precisely so as to defeat the closure of definitive interpretation”(108). However, I suggest this stanza performs a visual metaphor of the physical and emotional conflict and trauma of the interchange between daughter and father. In poetry of related and connecting fragments, that which is omitted from the narrative must be considered. Something may be left out because it has been lost. Something may be buried in memory. Something may resist the telling. Part of the substance of Sappho’s Gymnasium and of “Prayerfields” is a debt to the Sappho of Lesbos whose story, whose poetry has survived incredible ravage in the course of time. That Sappho has survived as a viable literary figure for thousands of years is in itself a testimony to the power preserved in fragments that still speak to both fact and the long trail of collective imagination. In the immediacy of the trauma presented by Broumas and

Begley, the Sapphic fragment of hope is a tool for survival. There is no pleasure recorded in this poetic representation of an incestuous sexual scene, but there is grief and pain. A fatty throat is a term for a sore, swollen throat. The daughter is swimming out in the open sea. There are no protective islands for her in this vast environment. The father moves and the rhythm created by the poets to depict his movement is at once the rhythm of the waves and the motion of the inescapable force of sexual violation. While it will not stand up in court for a criminal charge, this stanza presents an identifiable traumatic event complete with emotional turmoil. Ingram's search for definitive interpretation is at odds with the boundary-defying essence of this entire book. Closure is not an issue for incest. Closure is not an issue for Holocaust victims. Survival is a life-long process.

Testimony is part of the survival process and functions best at pouring light onto topics concealed in layers of guilt, shame, and pain. In "Proem" and in the long poem "Prayerfields" Broumas and Begley achieve the revelation of light. Masturbation, rape, crime, castration are plain public words that enter the flow of narrative in a number of poems in Sappho's Gymnasium. Like the black wall of incised names of Vietnam war casualties that identify one-by-one dead soldiers from a dead war, there is reality in specificity that inscribes essential metaphor. The poets inscribe the emotional catalog with terms specific to the incest in the poem: pain, sugar bag, fear, bone, knife, and ventral join many other words that spoken individually do not present the reality of incest. Tied together with the spiritual thread of the prayerfield, they function as emotional mirrors.

As “Prayerfields” drives to its conclusion, the incest story resurfaces in various configurations that taken together form a trail that goes beyond trauma. Re-telling is one way to continue the testimony and witnessing that brings the act to the light of attention. Questions stir in the mind of the victim. She ponders the issue of infant abandonment and of the ramifications of obedience. In a complicated protest that crosses several stanzas she says:

without body
 extended in or taken up
 both grammars inescapably
 respire the flow
 or feeling itself like crying
 biting hitting in which activity
 and rest depression protects (33)

This garden of contradictions presents the body as a thing that can be altered to fit an unstated mold. Where there is no body there is no physical voice and what is left are the tools the voice could have used – grammars, two grammars that are the equivalent of a universe of telling. Instead they are compelled to perpetuate the flow of feeling wherein lies depression, one of the legacies of incest. In a disjointed catalog of assimilation, the body is addressed by the names of its parts, “the eye the esophagus the authentic,” as it is called back into physical existence. This work exhausts women who grow out of breath in activity that suggests the rigors of birth. This prospect is supported by the tender image of a child lying across someone’s knees. Again these actions speak of re-birth, of fresh

beginnings. This difficult progress calls to mind the pleated trail skirting ruins. In a narrow escape that includes the possibility of suicide, the victim finds herself able

to love the
actual
watchful
young adult genital oral (37)

Even those intimate parts, site of violation and trauma, are physically present again and part of her own body she is learning to love. This is the body from a few lines back when she said,

those for whom I shine this is my in
sight of the entirely feminine for the living roots (35)

This brief landmark of self-discovery splits insight into a wealth of meaning. First, it is an entry, her introduction, her “in” with an inner circle. She is accepted into a group of women who represent the root of power, a kind of ancestral reality that would give her strength.

The speaker continues in “Prayerfields” to learn the value of her body, of women’s bodies and of love and pleasure. When she learns the strength she controls, she finds the way around the ruin that mars the landscape of the poem from its beginning:

the road did not continue beyond the spot where
he had stopped and the unforgiven
contracts touch and
be done if I can rest now if I can rest
in the singularity of your body the way
you sleep in my open palm (48)

Clearly the last lines refer to lesbian love and love-making. There is an exchange of equals and an exchange of welcome represented by that open palm. Ripe with tenderness, the loving scene continues in the next stanza with these lines:

you
 whose back is soft whose meaning is
 soft proprioceptive (49)

Oh what a word! Celebrated by the OED with this definition: “Capable of responding to stimuli from within the body” In one of the examples of use, the lexicographer offers: “I chose dance as the primary medium in which to tell this story, because I want it to be sensed physically, proprioceptively, as if foaming out from inside the body.” In Broumas and Begley’s poem, the body that was so terribly mishandled has now the power to direct the life within it.

In a moving stanza near the end of “Prayerfields,” the daughter leaves the syntax of insult, trauma, incest, behind and chooses a path to faith:

let us begin with pleasure
 from there derive meaning or discover
 I put my hammock next to yours
 I committed all the necessary murders within myself
 to acquire faith (51)

The lessons in this long Psapphan school are coming to a close. The star pupil is the woman who learned the value of transformation that includes a choice that lets her accept

herself as a worthy person. From the fire of incest, she emerges tempered with strength. She is no longer subject; she is an agent acting from the power within her own body. Broumas and Begley, in “Prayerfields,” demonstrate the use of unconventional grammar, fragmented stanzas and sentence structure, unique language and imaginative metaphor to shift perceptions of great power from traditional sources and to relocate the source of that power in women’s bodies. This is an engineering feat of impressive literary proportion.

Sappho’s Gymnasium continues with several short sequences of poems. “Helen Groves” is placed at the right hand of the goddess, next in line to “Prayerfields.”

Delta: Helen Groves and Other Poems

“Helen Groves,” a poem published as a chapbook in 1994, the same year that Sappho’s Gymnasium appeared, is the collaborative work of Olga Broumas and T Begley. In the book, the poem appears in sequence directly after “Prayerfields.” and is followed by several shorter sequences of poems. Its placement indicates that the poem will in some way continue and directly link to the messages and meanings of “Prayerfields.” Since “Helen Groves” was also printed as a separate chapbook, the poem must be strong enough in statement and meaning to exist outside any narrative thread that connects it sequentially to the inclusive work. However, since the poets consciously resist artificially imposed boundaries and limitations of any kind, the link may be less than obvious.

The title, “Helen Groves,” is not mentioned in the body of the poem. The poets offer no reference to explain the title. Even the ubiquitous Google is silent on the matter. Ambiguity surrounds the title since it could be a person’s name or it could be the name of some sylvan location. The single apparent evidence of continuity is the name “Helen.” Could it allude to Helen of Troy, daughter of Zeus and Leda, at the epicenter of the Trojan War, perhaps one of the most visible and famous characters of Greek lore, pawn to patriarchal powers? How Groves might be attached to Helen’s name is a mystery and we shall stop at that. How the name Helen Groves came to be the title of the poem is also a mystery for the nonce. It has a pleasant woodsy sound and we can love it for that.

It is in format and language use that “Helen Groves” appears to be a continuation of “Prayerfields.” 108 lines of poetry are divided into 27 stanzas across 27 pages. The poets do not use punctuation, capitalization or other basic elements of English grammar.

As in “Prayerfields,” pronouns may be ambivalent. The use of fragmented expression is a linking constant. Imagery centering on light is even more prevalent in “Helen Groves” than it is in “Prayerfields.” Olga Broumas stated that the appearance of the poem on the page is very important to her. If format and style of presentation are important adjuncts to a cogent reading, the poem “Helen Groves” offers three manifestations with which to explore the issue.

In 1994 Copper Canyon published two versions of “Helen Groves.” One is the second section of Sappho’s Gymnasium and the other is a special chapbook. The third edition is found in Rave: Poems 1975 – 1999 which is also a Copper Canyon production. It was published in 2000. Each book has its own typeface and unique book design. The poems in the 1994 copies are presented textually in similar fashion with small blocks of text printed on pages that are mainly white space. The chapbook is an art presentation with covers of elegant blue paper, in essence a collector’s edition. The 2000 edition is radically different from the other two. The poem is printed with multiple stanzas lined up in small blocks on each page. Instead of 27 pages, “Helen Groves” is printed on only 6 pages. There is some variation in text or sequential placement of the poems in the three editions.

The greatest difference in a reading of the poems is caused by expectation that is generated by the physical presentation of the works. In the version of “Helen Groves” printed in Sappho’s Gymnasium the issue of incest hovers in the air, even though there is no specific mention of the topic anywhere in the poem. The poem itself is filled with images that relate to religious purification rites and to questions of personal questing for spiritual clarity. Because these poems are textually presented after “Prayerfields,” the

reader automatically fills in some of the fragmented spaces with connections to incest. Sensual and sexual allusions refer to lesbian love-making. There is an instance in which the poets disregard their vow to consider only the present time. As in “Prayerfields,” spiritual elements are important.

Below are two stanzas, one from “Prayerfields” and one from “Helen Groves.” (Page references will all refer to Sappho’s Gymnasium.) In the first poem, trauma is the ruling image. A burning river is an unnatural event; that which should quench fire is itself burning. It is as unnatural as a father who rapes his child; the man who should be the protector is instead her agent of destruction. It is a fierce stanza of catastrophic events. At the end the suggestion of kneeling, of genuflection is accompanied by the plea, the victim’s prayer that this sexual act will be “unspasmed” or thwarted. In the poem from “Helen Groves” which follows “Prayerfields” and which is presented as a complete verse on its own page, the reader immediately looks for the connection which generated that particular placement of the poem. The burning church and the watery figures point back to the awful events that precede them in the book. The poem seems much denser and more difficult to read. The words “I was dead” seem much stronger than “I was born again.” The female power vested in birth seems very distant in this overlaid picture.

father burn the river down our
 being consists of the ripening
 tongue with images of castration ride
 the river down low
 lighted flexion receive god unspasmed

(“Prayerfields” 28)

I saw her foot
 then a church burning down
 with its figures of water then star starkness
 she is all I was dead but I was born again
 head to guts in her blanket

(“Helen Groves” 61)

To read the “Helen Groves” poem with no reference to incest can make it sound very different. The overwhelming image is of birth and re-birth. There is ambiguity of the foot and whose foot it might be. It could be a foot presented in a breech birth, it could be a lover’s foot. Since it is not the speaker’s foot, there is clearly another person present in the poem, though it is not a threatening presence. The image of the burning church suggests a rejection of institutionalized religion and its dogma. Baptism, for example, is expressed in insubstantial figures of water. What is left after the fire burns and the water evaporates is natural light from the stars, suggesting a fresh approach to spirituality. The birth image is presented three ways. The star gets to do extra duty to represent the birth of Christ. The “born again” phrase appropriates the power of the Christian concept and its claim to everlasting life and relocates that power in the woman’s body through the physical image of birth. It is a gritty, physical rendering of birth that emphasizes the elemental connections of body, “head to guts.” This poem could be read in the same powerful way no matter where it is found. I maintain, however, that sequence and proximity affect the reading of any poem. When it is paired with a strong poem that is printed in a format that indicates relationship, there is a shift in the reader’s perception and possibly her understanding. In the case of the “Helen Groves” poem, the third presentation is the one in multiple block stanzas per page as printed below:

I saw her foot
 then a church burning down
 with its figures of water then star starkness
 she is all I was dead but I was born again
 head to guts in her blanket

Islandlike in the morning
she bathes in wet beaver creek
waiting for the sun to warm
limestone boulders dark lip
[.....]
In the turning of the sun she is the shining path
faith tender muscle

The poem now is suffused with sexual imagery. The phrase “wet beaver creek” injects a note of insouciant slang, There is a future expressed through an expectation of good life in which the sun will shine. There is great appreciation of the moment, of love and fulfilled spiritual desire. The last line suggests a subtle play on faith, hope, charity in which faith accompanied by hope for redemption and a divestment of self and worldly goods is replaced by faith tempered with human tenderness and the strength of the woman’s body. There is nothing in the presentation of the poem that indicates struggle

final shorter poems from Sappho's Gymnasium, that she was impacted by placement and by the congruity of those poems and their spiritual and sexual texts. Whatever the cause she made at least two startling changes, as well as a great many other changes in stanza order. Broumas switched the order of the "wet beaver stanza" so that it directly precedes the church burning, birth scene stanza. The switch greatly enhanced the sexuality expressed there, since the major changes, including the "born again" event can be seen as reactions to the power of the sexual body. A switch in word choice makes a startling change in the short stanza from Sappho's Gymnasium:

In the turning of the sun she is the scalding path
faith tender muscle (64)

In Rave this becomes:

In the turning of the sun she is the shining path
faith tender muscle

From an environment where rivers burn to one where women enjoy serenity, sexuality and strength, that word change, scalding to shining, indicates that for Olga Broumas the world is a relative place and always open for exploration and change.

Following "Helen Groves" Broumas and Begley add eight more separately titled sequences of poems to Sappho's Gymnasium. Each sequence is a separate lesson in this special school. Their most visible link, one to the other, is their physical shape. Like the other poems in Sappho's Gymnasium, most poems in these sequences are printed one to a page in a field of white space. Images of light, water, and birds are common. Earth, air, fire, and sea, the four natural elements of antiquity, are present in one form or another throughout the book. They may be juxtaposed in unusual ways. When water and fire are

used together, water is as likely to burn as it is to serve ceremonial purposes. Birds, creatures of the sky and earth, are often sexual metaphors. Light is a primary image for Broumas and Begley. Since it was the first order of creation, light is often presented as an agent of change. After “Helen Groves,” next in line is “Vowel Imprint” which starts with a fervent invocation: “Transitive body this fresco amen I mouth” (77). Echoes from “Prayerfields” of themes of change that register in and through the body surface in the line, “my life spent swimming” (80). In “Prayerfields” the victim was swimming to save her life in holocaustic metaphor, while in “Vowel Imprint” the swim is tied to the cleanest house, the cleanest bed, in a place almost devoid of human presence and interest. A voyeuristic sexual scene counterbalances the clean room, when the speaker and her lover engage in vigorous sex outside in a field. Woman to woman sex was the object of the neighbors’ gaze. The happy sex couple were not shy. The two lines:

I like to be your digging stick
marital female mass

is a much quoted piece that suggests sexual practice.

“Flower Power” opens with a surprise of multiple stanzas on the same page. The cadence of the speakers’ words is slowed by the repetition of line, a tactic poets often use when they address a royal presence. In this case the speaker seems to be witnessing either a sexual attack on a woman or some very rough sex. Because the speaker moves on to other subjects, that action is an isolated event. The section serves as a statement of sexual variance. It ends with lines describing masturbation, though it seems unusually non-sensual for these poets. The next poem, “Your Sacred Idiot With Me” evokes a sense of acceptance for difference through its stunning title. It suggests a

holiness in those who are insane. This is a long way from the insane act of incest, Life now is vested in a person, not an act. The person, however, as is customary in these poems is not a recurring character. There seems to be an effort by Broumas and Begley to open the text of Sappho's Gymnasium to a variety of ways for one to enter a spiritual, sexual, or healing experience. Self-love, purification, and meditation have a presence in these poems. Because the themes are universal, a reader can see the connections with the main poems in the book, "Prayerfields" and "Helen Groves." Even when individual poems link awkwardly to the whole, recurring images create a theme that make it worth the effort for the reader to search out the connection.

A valuable theme in this varied selection of poems is centered on writing, especially poetry. In "Vowel Imprint," Broumas and Begley comment on poetry that goes deeper than simple surface images. Certainly applicable to the dense rich text of "Prayerfields" is this brief stanza:

I have procreated
 unless writing
 studies the image
 and no more (85)

There are words on every page of Sappho's Gymnasium that operate on multiple levels to deepen and add meaning to the poems. "Procreated" carries the flavor of all the begats in the Bible. As well as indicating birth, it means bring into existence, produce, to give rise to and it suggests other generative acts from husbandry to botany. As Broumas and Begley use it in this stanza, they link the literary process of writing poetry to one of

women's notable roles, childbearing. In one of their frequently used tactics, they effect the exchange of strength between the two processes.

The concern for issues relating to language and the creation of poetry, however, must surely peak in the first poem of "Photovoltaic." The opening line is so much quoted it is almost a signature piece for the poets: "Lord let me all I can wild cherry" (161). Sensuous with its hymeneal reference linked to a lusty call for as much as possible, it evokes a first response of enthusiastic appreciation. A little deconstruction leads the reader to observe the absence of an active verb and the possibilities raised by omission.

Let me have all I can wild cherry; Let me resist all I can wild cherry; Let me labor all I can wild cherry; Let me laugh all I can wild cherry; Let me love all I can wild cherry. In my playful list, another omission is evident. When "Lord" is removed the statement stands as an imperative sentence. Broumas and Begley cast the original statement as a supplication, thus softening the imperative mode. It is the cry, "wild cherry" that resonates in the imagination, unexpected, appealing, and suggestive. This sentence could stand alone as a line of effective communication if the poets wished. It is language oriented craft that represents a strong element of communication. The very next stanza of "Photovoltaic" reads

write poems
starve off death (162)

"Starve" instead of stave? This is another instance of original word substitution. Food withholding imagery suggests a very direct method of resistance. The change is subtle, the effect is powerful. One letter turns this line into an active revolt or defaults it to a mode of self-preservation. Once more, a power located in the body is appropriated to strengthen another concept. The threat of starvation underpins a lack of poetry. The last

poem in “Photovoltaic” is a catalog of things that poetry can win, heal, soothe or solve. The poem resolves the issue of the search for answers with one word, “Poetry” (168). Broumas and Begley make a case for the value of poetry and literature in the lives of people. Just as they called poetry to their aid to explore incest, the power of the body to heal and to add strength to women’s love and life can be tapped at will. They turn to this strategy one more time in the last poem, “Sappho’s Gymnasium,” the title piece of the book.

Broumas and Begley construct the ending poem by referring carefully back to “Proem” in order to create a full circle. The section begins with a series of statements that can be traced back to that excellent introduction. Two of the finest linking statements on the page are the first and the last,

Outside memory worship never dies

[.....]

Make praise populations last

They succeed in separating worship from the institutionalized setting and vesting the power of worship in women’s bodies. They were faithful to Sappho’s principle to resist things that would bring tears and to Elytis’s rule to refuse to let anything into their poetry that would dishonor them. In a somewhat self-conscious parade of images and key words, the poets compile the basic goals established in “Proem” to bring Sappho’s Gymnasium to a conclusion. Sappho’s fragmented heritage is honored by an intuited stanza of uncertain authorship (185: note 171). In a play of words that is reminiscent of Gertrude Stein, they chant

Pansappho unscalp unfleece unscalpel

unskin of flowers our kin (127)

In a continuation of the Steinean mode they write a very funny fake noun declension:

Lesmonia, Lemonanthis, Lesaromas, Lesvaia (178)

Not one of these words has a dictionary birth certificate. In common they share a faux prefix that suggests Lesbian. A sense of play surfaces as the words break down by virtue of sound or spelling into a series that suggests special sensory attributes for lesbians. Sound, taste, smell and a mystery declension open for exploration in which all combine to celebrate the lesbian presence.

In a more stately mode Broumas and Begley offer a beautiful stanza that re-defines the soul in secular terms when they give it physical presence drawn from the body:

The Soul has a knee

just risen just rinses (181)

In an echo from the proem that could easily draw part of its meaning from the line just above it, “tongue I owe you,” the poets remind the reader of the beginning of the explorations that form Sappho’s Gymnasium:

Pupil only to you

fleece of dew (181)

All the trails converge at the riverside and the work ends with Brouma and Begley’s universal constant, which is poetry:

Wanderer gathers dusk in mountains

to its end the wind the stream

only riverbank hurry me

Only poetry

Omega: The Conclusion

Olga Broumas by her Greek birthright and T Begley through the rigors of scholarship claim Sappho, lesbian icon and famous Greek poet of antiquity, as part of their heritage and inspiration. Sappho, possibly the first published woman poet in the western world and first headmistress of a finishing school for women on the Isle of Lesbos, gives Sappho's Gymnasium a historical foundation. Although she is a thoroughly assimilated American writer, Broumas cannot be read apart from her Greek roots. Her poetry is grounded in the mythology, history, culture, style and voice of her native country. Her connection with and translations of the prose and poetry of Greek poet Odysseas Elytis are the bedrock underpinning her career in poetry. Karen Van Dyck, professor of Classics at Columbia University speaks of the intellectual exchange and impact on cultures of good translations. In Van Dyck's description of the relationship that thrived during the collaborations shared by Broumas, Begley and Elytis, she commends Broumas's role in transferring American idiom to Greek, thus opening English for the reception of the syntax and meanings of Greece. Elytis's translation of Sappho expands the value of the collaboration between Broumas and Elytis. According to Van Dyck:

There is something of his experience of having been translated by the lesbian poet Broumas that seems to have authorized him as much as his geographically adopted home Lesbos to translate Sappho. Sappho's fragments resonate with Elytis's translations of these fragments which then turn up in Broumas's and T Begley's Sappho's Gymnasium. Greek poetry is Sappho, it is Elytis and Elytis's Sappho; it is Broumas and Broumas's Elytis and Broumas's Sappho by way of Elytis (8).

In the book, Sappho's Gymnasium, Olga Broumas and T Begley draw upon Sappho and Odysseas Elytis for primary inspiration both in the structure of the book and for metaphorical style. Fragmented phrases and incomplete utterances in the stanza sequences connect this contemporary work very directly to the surviving fragmented remnants composed in the 6th century BCE by Sappho. There is a powerful connection among the dead and the living poets because of their shared focus and agreement on what is appropriate in poetry. That they share commonality of belief that moral and emotional strength is located in the physical body rather than in state or religious institutions, erases the impact of time on the relevancy of their writings for contemporary readers. Though political institutions have created very different worlds for the lives of Sappho, Elytis, Broumas and Begley, the body with its needs and desires has changed very little. The body becomes a common language for these poets.

As part of her finishing school education in poetry, Olga Broumas's translations of Odysseas Elytis grounds her in the poetry of Greece and her writing owes much to her famous mentor. That debt expands to include T Begley who helped with the translation of prose works by Elytis. The abstraction of expression, infinite attention to word choice, and the role of the body in Sappho's Gymnasium stem from the multiple interactions among the poets. Broumas continues to publish poetry. Her output and publishing history are summarized in the Appendix. T. Begley teaches and is active in the arts in New England. Odysseas Elytis died in 1996. Sappho died in the 6th century, BCE. The influence

of both Elytis and Sappho survives and may be seen today in Sappho's Gymnasium by Olga Broumas and T Begley.



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APPENDIX

OLGA BROUMAS: BIBLIOGRAPHIC STATEMENT U.S. Publications by Type and Library Distribution, 1973 - 2007

Olga Broumas: Bibliographic Statement
Advance the Corpus

To lie down in the snow and make a body print in its cold soft mass, a person needs to commit the entire body to an alien substance. To make a visible print in the ethereal substance of literature, a writer sends out a work into an alien storm of editors, publishers, printers, producers, promoters, distributors and organizers to reach the ultimate haven, a reader. The concept of the journey as a destination is tested many times during this odyssey. To see a wing and possibly more of the writer's angel, a searcher can turn to WorldCat, one of the world's largest and most comprehensive collections of information on the production of knowledge and letters.

Olga Broumas's earliest published work does not appear in WorldCat. Inquietude is a chapbook published in Greek in Athens in 1967 when she was eighteen years old. Although no extant copy of the book is listed in any accessible source, Broumas includes it as a publishing credit in the Vita of her MFA Thesis. This early representation of her poetic gift was followed by individual poems published in dozens of little magazines in that interim between Inquietude and her 1977 propulsion into the public sphere. That year brought the publication of her first full length book of poetry, Beginning With O and the subsequent conferral of the Yale Younger Poets Award. Five books of poetry followed in the years until 1994, two of them written in collaborative enterprise - one with Jane Miller and the last, Sappho's Gymnasium, with T Begley.

Broumas has maintained a strong relationship with the prestigious non-profit publisher, Copper Canyon since 1979. Broumas's publications through Copper Canyon include five books of poetry, four books of translation, three broadsides and a sound recording of Broumas reading her poetry. Copper Canyon maintains an archive of her

manuscripts. A retrospective volume, Rave, produced by Copper Canyon in 1999 contains selections from her many published works and acknowledges and celebrates her literary commitment of more than thirty years. The recent publication in 2006 of new poems from two collections, Opening Music and Theme Muscle and Scraptals by Olga Broumas positions her in the world of electronic publishing. These works were featured in The Drunken Boat, an electronic journal dedicated to poetry, translations and reviews of poetry collections and anthologies, interviews with poets, and features on various poetry presses. This journal has been in existence and published quarterly since 2000.

In a very revealing pattern, Broumas's bibliographic history presents a trail of increasing recognition across the United States. Inclusion in five anthologies or more of poetry indicates that her poetry is recognized as significant and important to the audiences targeted for the publications. Broadsides, chapbooks, and sound recordings that are published in very limited editions at widely varying locations speak of personal visits to these places. Broadsides and chapbooks are frequently used as promotional aids and the proliferation of sound recordings in varying formats speaks of the practice of local recording of a poet's reading. Like an iceberg, cataloged and documented broadsides give only a small glimpse of this kind of publishing activity. Most of these items are tucked into the pages of books shelved in home or office, used for quick notes, posted on bulletin boards, and sent to their last reward in recycle bins. That some few places save them reveals dedicated packrats at work or perhaps sophisticated organizers with a global view of the vitality and importance of limited small press publishing.

This bibliographic portrait offers two more clues to the shape and permanence of the Broumas poetry profile. A quick scan of the last column of the chart in the appendix

reveals information indicative of the publishing trends of the 21st century. There it will be noted that the number of Broumas's books reported held in the world's libraries diminishes across the time lines for print publication of new volumes of her poetry. Beginning with O in 1973 tops the chart at 710 libraries. Over the next fifteen years, the five books of poetry Broumas published ranged from a low of 127 libraries with holdings of a title to a high of 276, in every case an apparently staggering drop from those of the first book. Interspersed in the final notes field of the appendix, indications of electronic holdings appear. The fifteen years of fluctuating volume counts and the appearance of electronic versions of the published titles coincide with the time period in which Broumas published most of her complete books of poetry. This was a period of rapid, erratic explosion of the development of non-print publication, a blizzard of experimentation and exploration in innovative publishing, marketing, and delivery of formerly print based texts as well as corresponding chaos in the ways bibliographic access was provided for new titles. Rave, published in 1999, was reported to be in the catalogs of 417 libraries. The notice of the availability of electronic access through Bell and Howell also coincides with the beginning of an avalanche now continuing in libraries of the acquisition of electronic full-text access to an author's work. Combined with library cataloging practices that facilitate the inclusion of records of these virtual books in library catalogs, access expands daily to versions and editions of publication formerly inaccessible and provides new information for the scholar's slate. For Olga Broumas, these changes have resulted in the appearance of full text electronic publication of her work. They are embedded in large fee based proprietary databases such as ProQuest, EbscoHost, and Thomson-Gale's LION (Literature Online). Criticism, book reviews, and anecdotal

material are widely available through JStor and new databases developing almost daily. Broumas's work is embedded in this milieu and is in not in danger of being weeded and removed from the public reach.

The most recent entry in the bibliographic portrait is Broumas's inclusion in the archival collection of Charles Wright papers at the University of Virginia. Her correspondence with him is preserved and recorded. This connection could easily escape into the unknown without the scrabbling crawl of electronic "spiders" through the universe encoded in search engines of the World Wide Web. The only reference to Charles Wright I find in Broumas's work and interviews is an end note in Pastoral Jazz. There Broumas attributes to him the translation of two lines of poetry by Eugenio Montale that she used in "Jewel Lotus Harp"(73. That both Broumas and Wright, prize winning poets themselves, translated the poetry of two Nobel Laureate Southern European poets might be an interesting link between them and their own poetry. Archived papers are full of rich surprises. The electronic recording of the contents of archives and manuscripts at academic institutions is a relatively new process in the electronic world. Libraries, museums, and galleries are just now perfecting the technology that allows notice of the presence of isolated incidental materials to be posted online. In a few years, archival lists from numerous sources will reveal the hiding places of correspondence of many poets and writers and provide added depth to the world's perception of them. It is encouraging to see Olga Broumas already in the first wave of this developing electronic effort. The snow is soft and clean and her mark in it grows deeper each year.

U.S. Publications by Type and Library Distribution
1973 - 2007

Author(s)	Title	Publisher	Date	Notes
Broumas, Olga	<i>Weather (Thesis)</i>	Thesis (M.F.A.)-- Univ of Oregon	1973	Book -54 leaves- typescript (1 lib)
Broumas, Olga	<i>Caritas</i>	Jackrabbit Press - Eugene	1976	Chapbook -7 leaves (25 libs)
Broumas, Olga	<i>From Caritas Poem 3</i>	Out & Out Books	1976	Broadside (1 lib)
Broumas, Olga, Gary Snyder, Sam Hamill, et al.	<i>Hand Prints : a Collection of Poems from the 1977 Port Townsend Poetry Symposium</i>	Copper Canyon	1977	Broadside -18 broadside (2 libs)
Broumas, Olga	<i>Beginning with O</i>	Yale UP	1977	Book -74 p -also electronic: LION Chadwyck/Healey (1999) (710 libs)
Broumas, Olga and Roberta Kosse	<i>Portraits in Concert: Vocal Score</i>	(Original Manuscript)	1978	Archival mss - for music score of Twelve Aspects of God by Broumas - (1 lib)
Poetry Symposium	<i>Shin: Poems from the 1978 Poetry Symposium</i>	Copper Canyon	1978	Broadside -20 Broadside - Broumas entry is <i>Oregon landscape with blue.</i> (1 lib)
Broumas, Olga	<i>Imogene Knode</i>	[Guilford, Conn.] :Telephone Books	1979	Broadside -1 sheet (2 libs)
Broumas, Olga	<i>Soie Sauvage : Poems</i>	Copper Canyon	1979	Book -47 p (127 libs)

Author(s)	Title	Publisher	Date	Notes
Broumas, Olga	<i>Yellow Field Rose</i>	Kendrick, Idaho: Two Magpie Press	1979	Chapbook -11 leaves (3 libs)
Broumas, Olga	<i>Poetry Reading at Sarah Lawrence College</i>	Bronxville, NY: Sarah Lawrence	1980	Media -sound cassette (1 lib.)
Broumas, Olga	<i>If I yes</i>	Watershed Foundation at Folger Shakespeare Library	1981	Media -Sound cassette: selections from <i>Beginning with O</i> and <i>Soie Sauvage</i> (31 libs)
Broumas, Olga, Carolyn Forché, Henry Carlile, <i>et al.</i>	<i>Portfolio 82</i>	Copper Canyon	1982	Broadside - Collection of 7 unnumbered broadsides (6 libs)
Broumas, Olga	<i>Pastoral Jazz</i>	Copper Canyon	1983	Book -73 p (170 p)
Chester H. Jones Foundation.	<i>National Poetry Competition, 1984</i>	Chester H. Jones Foundation.	1984	Anthology - (4 libs)
Broumas, Olga; Jane Miller	<i>Black Holes, Black Stockings</i>	Wesleyan University Press	1985	Book -87p -also electronic: LION Chadwyck/Healey (2004) (231 libs)
Broumas, Olga	<i>Olga Broumas</i>	San Francisco: American Poetry Archive, The Poetry Center	1985	Media - Videocassette: Olga Broumas reads a selection of her poetry. (1 lib)

Author(s)	Title	Publisher	Date	Notes
Zipes, Jack David (Olga Broumas)	<i>Don't Bet on the Prince : Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England /</i>	Methuen	1986	Anthology - (<i>Little red riding hood</i> by Broumas) 2d ed. 1993
Broumas, Olga (Odysseas Elytis)	<i>What I love : Selected Poems of Odysseas Elytis</i>	Copper Canyon	1986	Translation; 96 p (305 libs)
Broumas, Olga and Jane Miller	<i>Poetry and prose poem readings</i>	University of Montana	1988	Media -Sound Cassette Broumas and Miller read from Black Holes...and American Odalisque (1 lib.)
Broumas, Olga (Odysseas Elytis)	<i>The Little Mariner</i>	Copper Canyon	1988	Translation; 128 p. (270 libs)
Broumas, Olga and Kim Stafford	<i>Longview Poetry Event</i>	Longview WA: Lower Columbia College	1989	Media - Videocassette: Kim Stafford and Olga Broumas read and comment on their poetry (1 lib)
Broumas, Olga: Frasconi, Antonio.; Miller, Steve	<i>Mercy</i>	NY:Red Ozier Press/Tuscaloosa, Alabama: Steve Miller	1989	Broadside - 46 cm limited ed. Of 40 copies (7 libs)
Broumas, Olga	<i>Perpetua</i>	Copper Canyon	1989	Book - 109 p (276 libs)
Broumas, Olga	<i>Poetry Reading</i>	Harvard Univ.	1989	Media -1 sound tape reel (1 lib)

Author(s)	Title	Publisher	Date	Notes
Broumas, Olga	<i>The Choir</i>	Alabama [Steve Miller]	1989	Broadside -4p with wrapper. Presentation item (1 lib)
Broumas, Olga, Katerina Angelake-Rouk and Alki Zel	<i>English and Greek Poetry and Prose Reading</i>	Cornell Univ.	1990	Media -sound cassette (1 lib.)
Broumas, Olga, Elytis Odysseas	<i>Translations of the Poems of Odysseus Elytis Poetry Reading</i>	Academy of American Poets, Harvard College Library	1990	Media - 2 sound tape reels (1 lib)
Barresi, Dorothy (Olga Broumas)	<i>All of the Above</i>	Beacon	1991	Anthology - (Foreword by Olga Broumas) Barnard new women poets series; Electronic also in NetLibrary (461 libs)
Broumas, Olga, T. Begley, Akken Ginsberg, et al.	<i>Amend #2 Panel 7/5/93</i>	Naropa Institute.	1993	Media -Sound Cassette: Panel discussion on Colorado's anti gay rights legislation (1 lib)
Seremetakis, C. Nadia	<i>Ritual, Power and the Body : Historical Perspectives on the Representation of Greek Women</i>	Pella	1993	Anthology - (55 libs)

Author(s)	Title	Publisher	Date	Notes
Broumas, Olga; T Begley	<i>Helen Groves</i>	Kore Press - Tucson, AZ	1994	Chapbook - unpaged - chapter from <i>Sappho's Gymnasium</i> (13 libs)
Broumas, Olga, T. Begley, Odysseas Elytes	<i>Office Files of the American Poetry Review</i>	Copper Canyon	1994	Archival mss - for publication, correspondence, translations - 22 items (1 lib)
Broumas, Olga; T Begley	<i>Sappho's Gymnasium</i>	Copper Canyon	1994	Book -185 p also electronic, Bell & Howell, 2000 (199 libs)
Broumas, Olga; T Begley (Odysseas Elytis)	<i>Open Papers</i>	Copper Canyon	1995	Translation; 188 p (199 libs)
Broumas, Olga; T Begley	<i>Ithaca Little Summer in Winter</i>	Radiolarian Press (1887853081)	1996	Chapbook -Wind Room Series 5 (1 lib)
Broumas, Olga (Odysseas Elytis)	<i>Eros, eros, eros : Selected and Last Poems</i>	Copper Canyon	1998	Translation; 171 p (231 libs)
Broumas, Olga, Timothy Morton, Harryette Mullen, and Keith Abbott.	<i>MFA Prose Course Jun 16 1998</i>	Naropa Institute	1998	Media -2 sound cassettes (1 lib)

Author(s)	Title	Publisher	Date	Notes
Broumas, Olga	<i>Rave : Poems, 1975-1999</i>	Copper Canyon	1999	Book -363 p - also electronic, Bell & Howell, 2000 (417 libs)
Broumas, Olga	<i>Olga Broumas</i>	Copper Canyon	2000	Media -Digital sound disc: Broumas reading from her "Rave: poems 1975-1999" and "Eros, eros, eros: selected & last poems" by Odysseas Elytis (16 libs)
Broumas, Olga	<i>The Choir</i>	Copper Canyon	2000	Broadside - (1 lib)
Broumas, Olga; T Begley	<i>Unfolding the Tablecloth of God</i>	[Tuscaloosa, Alabama] : Red Hydra Press	2000	Broadside - unpagged only in Princeton lib (1 lib)
Broumas, Olga (Metrophanes I. Kalafatas)	<i>"Winter Dream" in The Bellstone by Michael Kalafatas</i>	Brandeis University Press	2003	Translation
Evergreen State College	<i>Under a Silver Sky: an Anthology of Pacific Northwest Poetry, volume 1</i>	Evergreen State College	2003	Anthology - 1 CD-ROM (4 libs)
Wright, Charles	<i>Charles Wright Papers, 1951-2003</i>	Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library	2007	Archival mss - Broumas correspondence with Wright in Archival Material, University of Virginia, Charlottesville

VITA

Jill Game Carraway grew up in the sandy coastal plains of eastern North Carolina. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina and a Master of Library Science from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She taught high school English in North Carolina and in Indiana and then enjoyed a long term library career at Z. Smith Reynolds Library of Wake Forest University. She views The Master of Arts in Liberal Studies as the beginning of a phase of her life to be focused on poetry and the arts.