

**PHAON AND SAPPHO:  
A PLAY WITH  
SELECTION OF POEMS**

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Phaon and Sappho: A Play with Selection of Poems by J. D. Hosken

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**J. D. HOSKEN**

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## AUTHOR'S PREFATORY NOTE.

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I am unwilling to let "Phaon and Sappho" pass from my control into the outer world without a word of apology for one or two anachronisms, which if not apparent to the general reader, will readily suggest themselves to the scholar. It will be seen that Melanthos in putting his daughter's innocence to the test of arms, adopts the manners of chivalry, in which the fundamental ideas with regard to womanhood were entirely different from those held by the Greeks, during the time in which the events of this Play are supposed to have had place.

The nearest approach to the tournament of chivalry in classic writers is the contest between Paris and Menelaus, in the III Book of the Iliad, where the chance of victory as deciding the virtue of a third person is never once dreamed of, to the Greek such a subtilty would be above the proof of a physical issue!

Also it may be said that Grecian ideas were insufficient to express the fulness and entirety of human life, according to the usages of the modern Playwright as its exponent:—accordingly here and there some words may suggest ideas which were unknown to the Greek before the institution of Christianity; but which are perfectly at home in a work—

"Withholding time,  
But flattering the golden prime."

At this time so prolific in criticism, it would be rather late to point out anachronisms similar to those which I have alluded to in my own work, in the writings of some of the first rate minds of the past.

I leave Phaon and Sappho therefore to those who are able to take the impression of an unsophisticated human nature and age, uncurbed by the critical element which surrounds the conventionalities of modern life.

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# PHAON AND SAPPHO.

## PERSONS REPRESENTED.

TIMOLEON, <i>Governor of Lesbos.</i>	ATHENAGORAS, <i>a Philosopher.</i>
PELEON, <i>Prince of Epiru.</i>	ICABO, <i>young Gentleman.</i>
SESTRIS, <i>Prince of Egypt.</i>	BRASIDAS, <i>old Servant of Phaon.</i>
PHAON, <i>young Nobleman of Lesbos.</i>	LEON, <i>Boy Attendant of Sappho.</i>
CLEON, <i>Kinsman to Sappho.</i>	BRASS, <i>Timoleon's Butler.</i>
MELANTHUS, <i>Father to Hera.</i>	<i>Town Crier of Mytilene.</i>
MEMNON,	SAPPHO, <i>the Ward of Cleon.</i>
CRATES, } <i>Magistrates</i>	IOLÉ, <i>Companion of Sappho.</i>
ARISTARCHUS, } <i>of</i>	PENELOPE, <i>Aunt to Sappho.</i>
PELOPIDAS, } <i>Lesbos.</i>	HERA, <i>a Lady.</i>
ARCHIDAMUS, <i>a Priest.</i>	<i>Attendants.</i>
LEONIDAS, <i>Spartan Soldier, Friend of Phaon.</i>	<i>Soldiers, Officers, Musicians, and others.</i>

SCENE.—Mytilene in Lesbos, and Neighbourhood.

## ACT I.

SCENE I.—Mytilene. *A Public Place.*

*Enter PHAON and LEONIDAS.*

*Phaon.* Chide not the gentler humour of my mind ;  
For custom, and the habit of our lives  
Transform th' intent of nature in ourselves.  
The warlike institutions of your state  
Do give a martial tenor to your thoughts,  
Which else might be a shepherd's, lover's, fool's,  
Born in a state with lesser discipline ;  
And you might lay you down in wanton ease,  
And with your fancies fill the idle time,

Throughout the golden afternoons of Greece,  
 Gazing, through the transparent violet air,  
 At those old habitations of the Gods,  
 Which lift their rocky foreheads to the clouds.  
 O ! doubt it not, 'tis the caprice of fate,  
 Ruling the circumstances of our birth,  
 That makes us, this, or that.

*Leonidas.* Be as you are :  
 I will not vex you with a bantering tongue ;  
 But that put by, I do confess I would  
 See you possess a healthier relish of life :  
 You are no lover, thus to have your brow  
 Wrapped in the sable shadow of a thought :  
 You are but young in years, your course bids fair,  
 You have command of wealth, friends, influence ;  
 The ancient grandeur of your family  
 Entitles you to reverence and respect :  
 Though, as a Spartan, I am taught to look  
 Upon these things as straws, superfluous,  
 And therefore should find other things to praise ;  
 Yet, knowing it would be but labour lost,  
 To shew you up the value of your life  
 According to a foreign estimate,  
 I, as a Mytilenian, speak to you.  
 Here comes a different thinker. [Enter ICARO.

*Icaro.* Midnight again !  
 O ! what a treasure melancholy is,  
 That men—and one especially—hug it so.  
 Have you the toothache, Phaon, or the stitch ?  
 Or are you on an everlasting search  
 For something dropped upon the dusty earth,  
 You walk with downward gaze ?

*Phaon (aside).* Prevalent remark.

(*aloud*). Icaro, I have lost my former self.

*Icaro.* Then come with me, and in a cup of wine  
 I'll conjure up that absent excellence  
 That used to be the essence of all mirth,  
 Drained through the finest sieve of scholar's wit ;  
 Or I'll invoke the devil out of you



By the bare aspiration of a sigh. (*sighs*)  
 If you are lost in thought, I'll find your thought,  
 And bring you gently back your former self ;  
 If you are lost in love, I'll find you there.  
 Lost to yourself, be not to others lost,  
 Or I shall get the crier of the town  
 Proclaiming you as such ; I'll Phaon find  
 Or ears are deaf, or eyes most surely blind.

*Phaon.* I am no bankrupt.

*Icaro.* That's a too thriving trade  
 For men to wear sad faces on, I think.

*Phaon.* Nor yet in love.

*Icaro.* Less cause for sadness that.

*Phaon.* Nor troubled with much thought.

*Icaro.* Then why not merry  
 Seeing you have no reason to be sad ?  
 Methinks some stranger soul doth tenant you.  
 Warlike Leonidas, you stand aside—  
 How is my Spartan ?

*Leonidas.* Would Phaon were as well.

*Icaro.* He is a gentleman dear to us all,  
 And therefore we must grieve to see him thus.

*Leonidas.* Your sympathy for him makes you my friend ;  
 Speak to him further, I perceive your words  
 Rouse him above his wont.

*Icaro.* Phaon ! the news !  
 The Princes of Epire and Egypt come,  
 Being students and companions from their youth,  
 In visitation to our honoured Isle ;  
 Lesbos being in the line and route of travel  
 That they propose to go. Come with us now,  
 And you will see their landing, and their state :  
 The bustle and commotion of the day  
 Will help to dissipate your darker mood  
 By loss of individuality  
 Among a crowd that spurs your interest up.  
 'Tis a prime remedy !

*Phaon.* No, not to-day.

*Icaro.* My efforts being spent I haste away. [Exit.

*Leonidas.* My gentle friend, your life and interest have  
A habitation large within my heart ;  
Say, can I not persuade you any way  
To taste the stirring pleasures of the day ?  
Come, let me exercise that mild command  
Which friends put forth in love.

*Phaon.* Leonidas,  
I am a burden to your noble care,  
More than my state it grieves me to be so—  
I will not tie you constant to my side,  
It is mere selfishness.

*Leonidas.* Farewell awhile,  
I'll come to you at evening—Be a man !

*Phaon.* Best men are like myself at times,—farewell !  
[Exit LEONIDAS.

Here comes my man. [Enter BRASIDAS.

*Brasidas.* Sir, sir, I've sought you long.

*Phaon.* And having found me, what would Brasidas ?

*Brasidas.* Your fits of absence and of solitude  
Make me most anxious about your estate.  
Come, come, my Lord, I am your elder, think,  
Listen to understanding and good words—  
I have been twice in every street to-day  
Searching you out : so I have found you now—  
Well, no more words about't, come home, come home,  
It is not safe for you to walk alone—  
Trust me—come home.

*Phaon.* By Jove ! what do you mean ?  
Think you I am a helpless lunatic ?  
What eccentricity, or strange mark have I,  
That makes the common eye single me out  
From madder mortals ? Brasidas ! go home !  
If you persist in boring me this way,  
I shall forget your ancient kindnesses  
And term of faithful services. [Exit BRASIDAS.

Yet am I mad,  
If madness is a loss of balance here ;

And that I am unbinged in some strange way,  
 Th' unsettled working of my thoughts displays :  
 And yet it is not madness ; but a loss  
 Of healthy energy ; life flags with me.  
 I have not lent my youthful vigour out  
 Unto lascivious courses, and so gnaw'd  
 The wormwood of a stale satiety.  
 There is a craving in my inmost soul  
 For some unknown and unpronounced want,  
 That shall absorb and dominate my life ;  
 Yet what it is I know not, nor can name  
 An undefined desire within myself ;  
 I do sustain a loss of that quick sense  
 Which did perceive all beauty, and I miss  
 The fresh enjoyment of my younger life,  
 When I should have it strongest. O despair !  
 Heaven send me something to arouse my life,  
 Or I shall bid my hastily winged prayers  
 Climb the Olympian hill, petitioning  
 Jove to dry up the taper of my life,  
 And send me hence. I will not home as yet,  
 But walk awhile beside the foaming seas. [Exit.

SCENE 2.—*The Sea Shore near Mytilene.*

*Enter SAPPHO.*

*Sappho.* Escaped the city with its restless life,  
 Here am I free. O Nature ! I to thee  
 Render my uncorrupted homage ; in Thee  
 I read the large benevolence of the Gods,  
 Whose indistinct and shadowy forms are seen  
 Before imagination's forming eye,  
 Within thin veils of clouds and curling waves :

[*Enter PHAON at a distance.*

This gift of song within me is a joy  
 Above the understanding of the world,  
 And all my heart is Nature's—nothing human  
 Pollutes, or shall pollute that shrine of love.