



# Sappho Says: Poems and Fragments of Sappho of Lesbos

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# **Sappho Says: Poems and Fragments of Sappho of Lesbos**

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## **Sappho Says: Poems and Fragments of Sappho of Lesbos** Sappho

A collection of poems and fragments by Sappho of Lesbos.

### **Sappho Says: Poems and Fragments of Sappho of Lesbos Details**

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## From Reader Review Sappho Says: Poems and Fragments of Sappho of Lesbos for online ebook

### Adriana says

Este libro es muy muy hermoso. Por empezar la edición es <3, tiene las versiones originales en griego y la traducción de un español que ni idea pero estuve comparando en la librería y me pareció que sonaba bien aunque probablemente no sea la más rigurosa. Igual me encanta esta editorial Hiperión. Sólo le hubiera agregado un par de notas al pie, por lo que veo se caracterizan por no poner demasiadas.

De los poemas y fragmentos qué decir, son poemas de amor, pedidos a Afrodita y a Hera, escenas de deseo, de celos, de enamoramiento, de amantes que se separan y se extrañan, de madres e hijas, me llegaron mucho al corazón.

Me gustó mucho este fragmento 49 P por ejemplo: "Me he enamorado de tí hace, Atis, ya tiempo /me pareciste una niña bajita y sin gracia" o este otro que hace referencia a una idea relacionada y que personalmente me atrapa mucho "Me estremece de nuevo desatador, /agridulce alimaña invencible, Amor // Sientes, Atis, desprecio al pensar en mí, /y por eso hacia Andrómeda vuelas tú".

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### Michael Palkowski says

Sappho is a literary construct, mythological more than tangible as her oeuvre consists of a single surviving poem with other fragments derived from scraps of parchment or quotations from other authors most of whom reproduced the work with the understanding that the reader probably knew the passage in question. Her life is a complicated set of identities and ideas supplanted onto a literary output. The introduction of the book delineates this quite well by discussing the various voyages and literary pilgrimages that writers and theorists have taken to the island of Lesbos in order to try and understand or experience for themselves, a fragmentary a-posteriori understanding to go hand in hand with their fragmentary textual a-priori. The ways to read Sappho are discussed and it makes a lot of sense to read fragments as messages, not self containing but as glances into a strange 'enlightening' culture. We often read poetry with the assumption of a private voice, a secluded introspective narrator and this is something that needs to be dispensed with in reading ancient poetics as the narrator is composing within the public forum, the voice is public and the composition is often done orally with others. This means that the attempts at biographical appropriation are pointless, not least because her work could entail more authors and could entail group composition. Indeed the introduction mentions that the authorship question is often ignored in favor of the folklore that the writer generates, with grandiose tales of love and betrayal all concocted from fanciful minds.

A good example mentioned in the introduction even shows the problems of interpreting the fragments we do have. 'Pais' is often assumed to relate to a child, or offspring but the word was also commonly used in lesbos to mean a slave or a companion. The fragment therefore changes its meaning depending on the interpretation of the translator. It changes from a poem expressing love of ones child, to a poem expressing love of another woman, to a poem expressing obedience and servitude in the name of another. This change occurs with the sole word, 'pais'. Another example is the fragmentary word which begins 'olisbos...' which has been interpreted as potentially relating to either a sex toy such as a dildo or a lyre string receiving a plectrum. Both interpretations are used politically to justify the reader's pre determined conclusion. The problem of course with attempting to classify sexuality from ancient civilizations is that they didn't use the same nomenclature to understand desire that we do. Desire crossed the homo/hetero binary without it being considered constitutive of a larger preference or sexuality, but rather it was normal. The ancient world was highly

pansexual in its orientation. Plato could imagine no other society, he tried and found it impossible. It's thus anachronism to think of Sappho as a lesbian.

This is what makes Sappho fascinating, her books supposedly burned in the library of Alexandria, we as readers formulate a novel from someone who lived, the poems are there for us to interpret and fix to our desired ideal. Wittig was keen on emphasizing the feminist qualities and the matriarchal implications of her lifestyle for example. It doesn't matter that we attempt to bridge over two millenniums apparently. The book makes these points brilliantly in the extensive introduction. Indeed the bulk and fat of the book itself is the introduction, which is clear, explanatory and well written.

As for the content of the work itself. I really enjoy most of the fragments from a technical standpoint and know a couple by heart. I hear Gregory Corso reading the completed poem (Fragment #1) the imagery alongside the concrete melodic flow is brilliant. The juxtaposition is often incongruous, perhaps due to the fragmentary nature of the work however the impact strikes due to it. "I do not expect my fingers to graze the sky" (Fragment #4) is a good example for its poignant, rich and reflective in its isolated form, perhaps even more so than if it were included in a longer piece. It's also staggering to think that Fragment #6 went unread for centuries, imagine unearthing a line like "Where cold water flows babbling through the branches". Furthermore, "The black sword of night in my eyes" (Fragment #72), is painful. It's especially vivid and mournful. Even with context, the cultural synthesis would have been difficult to fully ascertain and complete with any accuracy as is the case with the Homeric hymns and later works of poets like Catulus. However, the power of her writing is undeniably clear from the short segments that we have, proving that she was a remarkable force in her time. This shouldn't give us the illusion that we can construct her as a literary deity however for we simply don't know and this collection of completed works only satiates, giving a gaze into the world that was clearly tumultuous, difficult and strewn with endless conflict both personally and collectively.

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### Brianna Silva says

Ohhh, Sappho.

The first prominent, female voice in Western literature, and - as I understand it - the inventor of lyric verse, Sappho's poetry is as gripping and relevant as when it was written, **nearly three thousand years ago**.

She writes with passion, beauty, and intimate humanity.

But there is a dark history that has followed her over the millennia.

Because of the **homoerotic nature** of some of Sappho's poems, she is the reason we have words like "Sapphic" and "lesbian" (due to the island where she lived, Lesbos). But, sadly, this is also why much of her writings have been **intentionally destroyed** over the years by religious zealots.

Only one of her poems is still completely in tact. For the rest, we have fragments.

Reading these fragments often made my chest ache because I wanted so badly to know the whole poem. Even what we have is hauntingly beautiful.

It makes me so angry, too. With an anger I feel quite frequently as a queer woman, I'm sorry to say.

Still, reading even the torn remains of Sappho's works was a delight. I appreciated the thoroughness of this particular translation. It fully explained the history and context of her works, which was pretty cool.

This will be a classic to read again, for sure.

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### **Lydia says**

So this is my first time reading Sappho, and I absolutely loved it.

As a queer woman, I really wanted to read her because I wanted to feel her voice and I always want queer women to be represented in work. For me, this book was really special because of how ancient it is, which proves to me that queer people have been around since forever, and always will be.

... unfortunately, though, Sappho's work is fragmentary. Fragmentary because she was a woman, and she loved other women. Many of her poems were burned or destroyed, despite the fact that she was one of Greece's first and most prolific lyrical poets. (She wrote nine books!) If I think about it for too long, I get angry. And then I get angry that years later, after finally acknowledging her importance, academics (most of them white, male and heterosexual) vehemently denied her sexuality at every turn.

If I could say one thing to her, I would apologise, both for how she was treated, and how her work was treated.

MOVING ON, away from my bitter rant. This translation felt a little bit formal for me, so I'd like to read some others and explore more of Sappho's work and how differently her poems can be recommended. I absolutely loved her poems, though, and consumed them - perhaps too quickly. I'd love to reread this book again and just take more time to soak up her work.

I enjoyed the introduction and how many ancient people wrote about her, and what they thought about her, but overall the translator can be quite dry. I'm not sure if this will be my favourite translation, but I am excited to read another edition or translation because it'll be like experiencing the book all over again.

Because of the translation and how formal it was, I will give this book 4 stars. c:

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### **TheLibraryOfSarah says**

What lovely poetry from an incredibly talented woman. It's beyond a shame how much of her work was destroyed. There's something about her words- how they convey such strong, specific human emotions that transcend time. The love poems clearly addressed to women are absolutely lovely, as well as the imagery of

nature.

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### ◊Lilly◊ (Valley of the Books) says

I have now read three translations of Sappho's poetry, namely Poems and Fragments (translator: Stanley Lombardo), If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho (translator: Anne Carson), and Come Close, adapted from Stung With Love: Poems and Fragments (translator: Aaron Poochigan). It strikes me as interesting how the versions of the poems vary from edition to edition, depending on the translator's endeavor to preserve the original text or to adapt it for an English-speaking poetry audience.

Take one of the more straightforward verses, for instance the opening of fragment xvi:

#### Version A: (via Anne Carson)

Some man say an army of horse and some men say an army on foot and some man say an army of ships is the most beautiful thing  
on the black earth. But I say it is  
what you love.

#### Version B: (via Stanley Lombardo)

Some say an army on horseback, some say on foot,  
and some say ships are the most beautiful things  
on this black earth, but I say  
it is whatever you love.

#### Version C: (via Aaron Poochigan)

Some call ships, infantry or horsemen  
The greatest beauty Earth can offer;  
I say it is whatever a person  
Most lusts after.

Even if you haven't read fragment xvi in the original, it is fairly obvious which translation comes closest to the way the poem would have read more than 2000 years ago. Anne Carson's voice is almost entirely absent from her version of Sappho's words, giving the reader a portrayal of Ancient Greek poetry that is as authentic as possible. In contrast, Aaron Poochigan's translation clearly imitates Western tradition, complete with line capitalization, a semi-colon and ABAB rhyme. His adaptation technique works well in some instances, but his liberty with Sappho's poetic form erases structural aspects vital for poetic resonance, such as sequence of thoughts, like in this famous fragment:

#### Version A (via Anne Carson):

Someone will remember us

I say  
Even in another time

Version B (via Aaron Poochigan):

I declare  
That later on,  
Even in an age unlike our own,  
Someone will remember who we are.

While such Westernization of Sappho's poetry may be easier to digest in modern times, I cannot stress the importance of a text's accurate translation over its cultural integration. If we truly want to hear Sappho's words, we have to let her speak without Western filter. Otherwise it's like we traveled back in time only to colonize the literature of Ancient Greece for the sheer hubris of listening to the echo of our own voices.

\*Note: I personally prefer Stanley Lombardo's translation, as it seems to remain truthful to its source while demonstrating an awareness of our current poetic landscape.

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**Maria says**

Μωβ ?νειρα, Οδυσσ?ας

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**Max Maxwell says**

Ancient Greece was pretty emo. Whether it's lines like "There's a hole burning inside of me" (from Euripides' *Medea*, and source of Courtney Love's band's name), or the whole effeminate guys thing, or the quick-to-anger, quick-to-get-emotional attitude of goddesses like Artemis and Hera, the whole body of literature sits pretty nicely next to Brand New's discography. As we all know, emo kids seem to enjoy poetry involving words like "heart" and "feelings," so maybe they'd be interested in taking a time machine back to a time when this was the climate of the literary world was

...something like an ongoing poetry slam in which the archaic poets competed to describe Eros adequately and to produce the best image to depict his attack. Thus a sixth-century poet named Anacreon attempted to trounce his predecessors by delivering: "With a huge hammer Eros this time has struck me like a blacksmith and plunged me in an icy torrent."

That quirky description is from Pamela Gordon's introduction to Stanley Lombardo's translation of Sappho's coherent body of work. Of course, most of Sappho's poetry is similar, she being no exception to the emotional inclinations of her culture, but there's a discernible female subtlety to her "slams," i.e. in

Eros once more limbslackener makes me shudder  
Sweetbitter irresistible creeping

and

Eros has shaken my mind,  
wind sweeping down the mountains on oaks

This short book can be read in an hour or two, and mainly consists of fragmentary poems, some of which have been mangled by time, and others which are still poignant to the point of being gripping. Lombardo's job, given the limited source texts, is amazing; he is a great translator, to be sure. One can almost envision Sappho gently "pouring vinegar on the wounds" of her contemporary emo kids with her lyre, singing these lyrical ballads in such a way as to be way ahead of the whole Vagrant Records game.

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### **Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says**

"We are tantalized, too, that there could be more Sappho to come. A lost painting is lost forever: A copy is not an original. But with poems, every copy is the original, even a few lines scrawled on the back of a laundry list and stuffed into an Egyptian mummy. We hang on anxiously for every syllable that can be added to the lacework of loss, because Sappho seems to speak directly to us, as if knowing someday we would overhear. Tears prick my eyes when I read, even in Rayor's plain version, in a language that did not yet exist two and a half thousand years ago: I say someone in another time will remember us." ---

"Classical Intoxication: Love through the lens of Sappho."

Reviewd by A.E. Stallings

<http://www.weeklystandard.com/article...>

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### **A.J. Howard says**

For my money, the most heartbreak ending in literature is *The Name of the Rose*. Not to be too spoilery, but it involves a hidden library of countless classical texts (imagine Aristotle's *Comedy*, the lost plays of Sophocles, the collected correspondence of Alexander the Great, etc.) going up in flames. That the writings that form the cornerstone of Western civilization are often just the remnants that survived by fluke chance reinforces the all-encompassing impermanence of the human condition. I judge Jeopardy contestants when they can't properly name Motown backing bands. History has a way of making important things trivial and then forgotten.

Anyways, if there was a winner in this fictional fire it was Sappho. Sappho was widely acknowledged as one of the preeminent Hellenistic poets of the Classical Era. She was the rare woman who achieved predominance in their field in antiquarian times. And she achieved a level of predominance that is pretty staggering for anybody. For many classical Hellenes it was Homer then Sappho then everybody else. There are even sources found from hundred of years after her death basically saying that her stuff was going to be around forever. Now, all that's left is over a hundred fragments. Probably none represent a complete poem. Only a few (around a half dozen) even resemble a full poem. The vast majority are random excerpts, (often quotations from a second source) of a few lines are less. Many are just a line or a segment of a line.

However, this has paradoxically made Sappho the perfect poet for an ADD generation. I can appreciate it, but man reading Wordsworth go on for pages rhapsodizing about some meadow can be a bit of a drag. It's there to be found, but it takes a certain amount of elbow grease and sustained concentration to extract resonance out of a lot of poetry. Compare that to something like "Fragment 105:"

To himself he appears...

That's it. That's the poem. And it's not just great because it's short. Read the whole surrounding circumstances into those words. Those words are trace survivors of a body of work that was first widely acknowledged as sublime, then slowly forgotten about. Yet somehow, these words lingered on, and survived until Renaissance Europe rediscovered her work, around 2200 years after her death. These words have meant something to people throughout the ages. We can't precisely say what they meant to a Classical Greek, but the trace elements leave a kind of common empathy. Isn't that, for lack of a better word, poetic?

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### **Jonathan says**

Where to start? There are a number of enjoyable aspects of this book - the poetry is a given - so I will go on to some other points. I will say that the translation is wonderful and I enjoy its directness much more than Lattimore's selections in "Greek Lyric".

A lesbian poet, a poet from Lesbos, or both? The first time i heard of Sappho it was probably in reference to her being into chicks. If one were to read her poetry, and assumes as most do (rightly or wrongly) that the Narrative "I" is actually Sappho and not some other (whether patron or fictional character) then that assumption seems pretty spot on. Though it is stated that she was married and that she had a daughter. This all begs a response to the question of what was the purpose, audience, reception and setting of her poetry? These are not snippets from some woman's diary that posterity found in a landfill and made famous after the fact. Sappho - if this is not too anachronistic - was possibly as much a commercial venture as Michelangelo and his church commissions. We just do not know how economics, politics, or some other less tangible remuneration plays into the production and targets of her work. A wealthy family commissioning poetry for a chorus at a wedding, a religio-civic event (the two were inseparable) where Sappho is commissioned to produce a work in honor of the deity.....the list goes on. We just don't know. With that said - the ancient opinion mostly presumes her romantic interest in the same sex. Though this was not homosexuality as we moderns would perceive it. Homosexual diversions for both genders in the ancient Greek world were passionate pursuits (surely?), but one was still expected to marry, have children and further the continuance of the family, of property, of society. Dedicated homosexual relationships would have been anathema to the polis. All questions aside, the poetry is beautiful and moving. The fragments along with the few more complete pieces highlight how great the loss has been. Hopefully more of Sappho's words will come to light from the work at Oxyrhynchus.

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### **Ellen says**

amazing. what a gal

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### **Joseph says**

Simply and completely amazing. The bits of poetry that have survived only offer a small piece of the lost treasure of literature.

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### **anna (readingpeaches) says**

i'm amazed by this fact too but frankly??? lombardo's translation is one of my favourites

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### **Adriana Scarpin says**

Trabalho excepcional do Guilherme Contijo Flores esta obra é a edição definitiva sobre Safo no Brasil, fruto de um estudo filológico detalhado que deixam boquiabertos filólogos e estudiosos de poesia, como bem amantes da cultura grega em geral. O único porém são os fragmentos de algumas poesias de Safo, estes tão ínfimos que nem podemos saber do que se trata, mas isso, claro, não é um problema editorial e que não impede de efetivamente estarmos diante de uma grandiosa obra poética e filológica.

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