

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Sappho**  
**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**

2004

**Publisher:**

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

## Sappho(c. 600 BCE)

The only contemporary source which refers to Sappho's life is her own body of poetry, and scholars are skeptical of biographical readings of it. Later biographical traditions, from which all more detailed accounts derive, have also been cast into doubt.

An Oxyrhynchus papyrus from around AD 200 and the Suda agree that Sappho had a mother called Cleïs and a daughter by the same name. Two preserved fragments of Sappho's poetry refer to a Cleïs. In fragment 98, Sappho addresses Cleïs, saying that she has no way of obtaining a decorated headband for her. Fragment 132 reads in full: "I have a beautiful child who looks like golden flowers, my darling Cleïs, for whom I would not (take) all Lydia or lovely..." These fragments have often been interpreted as referring to Sappho's daughter or as confirming that Sappho had a daughter with this name. But even if a biographic reading of the verses is accepted, this is not certain. Cleïs is referred to in fragment 132 with the Greek word *pais*, which can as easily indicate a slave or any young person as an offspring. It is possible that these verses or others like them were misunderstood by ancient writers, leading to the biographical tradition which has come down to us.

Fragment 102 has its speaker address a "sweet mother", sometimes taken as an indication that Sappho began to write poetry while her mother was still alive. The name of Sappho's father is widely given as Scamandronymus, he is not referred to in any of the surviving fragments. In his *Heroides*, Ovid has Sappho lament that, "Six birthdays of mine had passed when the bones of my parent, gathered from the pyre, drank before their time my tears." Ovid may have based this on a poem by Sappho no longer extant.

Sappho was reported to have three brothers; Erigyus (or Eurygius), Larichus and Charaxus. The Oxyrhynchus papyrus says that Charaxus was the eldest but that Sappho was more fond of the young Larichus. According to Athenaeus, Sappho often praised Larichus for pouring wine in the town hall of Mytilene, an office held by boys of the best families. This indication that Sappho was born into an aristocratic family is consistent with the sometimes rarefied environments which her verses record.

A story given by Herodotus and later by Strabo, Athenaeus, Ovid and the Suda, tells of a relation between Charaxus and the Egyptian courtesan Rhodopis. Herodotus, the oldest source of the story, reports that Charaxus ransomed Rhodopis for a large sum and that after he returned to Mitylene, Sappho scolded

him in verse. Strabo, writing some 400 years later, adds that Charaxus was trading with Lesbian wine and that Sappho called Rhodopis Doricha. Athenaeus, another 200 years later, calls the courtesan Doricha and maintains that Herodotus had her confused with Rhodopis, another woman altogether. He also cites an epigram by Posidippus (3rd c. BC) which refers to Doricha and Sappho. Based on this story, scholars have speculated that references to a Doricha may have been found in Sappho's poems. None of the extant fragments have this name in full but fragments 7 and 15 are often restored to include it. Joel Lidov has criticized this restoration, arguing that the Doricha story is not helpful in restoring any fragment by Sappho and that its origins lie in the work of Cratinus or another of Herodotus' comic contemporaries.

The Suda is alone in claiming that Sappho was married to a "very wealthy man called Cercylas, who traded from Andros" and that he was Cleis' father. This tradition may have been invented by the comic poets as a witticism, as the name of the purported husband means "prick from the Isle of Man."

# A Hymn To Venus

O Venus, beauty of the skies,  
To whom a thousand temples rise,  
Gaily false in gentle smiles,  
Full of love-perplexing wiles;  
O goddess, from my heart remove  
The wasting cares and pains of love.

If ever thou hast kindly heard  
A song in soft distress preferred,  
Propitious to my tuneful vow,  
A gentle goddess, hear me now.  
Descend, thou bright immortal guest,  
In all thy radiant charms confessed.

Thou once didst leave almighty Jove  
And all the golden roofs above:  
The car thy wanton sparrows drew,  
Hovering in air they lightly flew;  
As to my bower they winged their way  
I saw their quivering pinions play.

The birds dismissed (while you remain)  
Bore back their empty car again:  
Then you, with looks divinely mild,  
In every heavenly feature smiled,  
And asked what new complaints I made,  
And why I called you to my aid?

What frenzy in my bosom raged,  
And by what cure to be assuaged?  
What gentle youth I would allure,  
Whom in my artful toils secure?  
Who does thy tender heart subdue,  
Tell me, my Sappho, tell me who?

Though now he shuns thy longing arms,  
He soon shall court thy slighted charms;  
Though now thy offerings he despise,  
He soon to thee shall sacrifice;

Though now he freezes, he soon shall burn,  
And be thy victim in his turn.

Celestial visitant, once more  
Thy needful presence I implore.  
In pity come, and ease my grief,  
Bring my distempered soul relief,  
Favour thy suppliant's hidden fires,  
And give me all my heart desires.

Sappho

# A Lament For Adonis

Cytherea, thy dainty Adonis is dying!  
Ah, what shall we do?  
O Nymphs, let it echo, the voice of your crying,  
The greenwood through!

O Forest-maidens, smite on the breast,  
Rend ye the delicate-woven vest!  
Let the wail ring wild and high:  
'Ah for Adonis!' cry.  
O Sappho, how canst thou chant the bliss  
Of Kypris — after such day as this?  
'Oh Adonis, thou leavest me — woe for my lot!  
And Eros, my servant, availeth me not!' —  
So wails Cytherea, grief-distraught.  
'Who shall console me for thee? There is none —  
Not Ares my god-lover, passionate one  
Who sware in his jealousy forth to hale  
Hephaestus my spouse from his palace, if he  
Dared but to lift his eyes unto me.  
Not he can console me, Adonis, for thee!'

Wail for Adonis, wail!

Sappho

# Although They Are

Although they are  
only breath, words  
which I command  
are immortal

Sappho

# An Epithalamium

Fragments 91, 92, 99, 106, 104, 103, 100, 105, 101, 102, 96, 109, 93, 94, 97, 95, and 133 combined.

Raise high the beams of the raftered hall,  
(Sing the Hymen-refrain!)  
Ye builders, of the bridal-dwelling!  
(Sing the Hymen-refrain!)  
Lo, the bridegroom comes, as the War-god tall —  
(Sing the Hymen-refrain!)  
Now nay — yet our tallest in stature excelling;  
(Sing the Hymen-refrain!)  
For stately he towers above all the throng  
As the Lesbian singer towers among  
All alien poets, a prince of song.

O happy bridegroom! it cometh to-day,  
The bridal thine heart hith longed for aye!  
At last shall she be thine own, the maid  
For whom thou hast sighed, for whom thou hast prayed.  
For none other maiden beneath the skies,  
O bridegroom, was like unto her in thine eyes.  
Whereunto may I liken thee, bridegroom dear?  
To a green vine-shoot in the spring of the year.  
Now, now let the bridegroom rejoice, for the bride  
Into the hall cometh joyful-eyed.  
Ethereal-pale is her lovely face.  
Hail, bridegroom! Hail, bride, queenly in grace!  
How goodly to see thy lord stands there!  
And his goodness will keep him for thee ever fair.  
Ah, doth she, ah doth she regretfully brood? —  
Does her heart still yearn after maidenhood?  
Nay, not in this hour she cries:  
'Maidenhood, maidenhood, whither away  
Forsaking me?'  
While maidenhood replies:  
'Not again unto thee shall I come for aye,  
Not again unto thee!'  
No more, no more doth she chant  
Proud young virginity's vaunt:



'As the sweet-apple flames on the tip of a spray against the sky,  
At its uttermost point, which the gleaners forgot, and passed it by —  
O nay, they forgot it not, but they could not attain so high.'  
But she thinks of the fate, an evil thing,  
That the years fast-fleeting to fair maids bring.  
When the roses are faded, the gold turns grey.  
And the smoothness is furrowed, as singeth the lay —  
'As the hyacinth-flower on the mountain-side that the shepherds tread  
Underfoot, and low on the earth its bloom dark-splendid is shed.'  
Lo, her hand into thine hath her father given.  
And thou leadest her home 'neath the Star of Even;  
To thy portal the bridal-train draws near.  
And the Chant Processional rings out clear:  
'Hail, Hesper, who bringest home all  
That radiant Dawn scattered wide,  
Bringest back unto fold and stall  
The sheep and the goat, and thy call  
Brings the child to the mother's side.  
Let the rose-ringed Star of the Evenfall  
Usher thee on, love's willing thrall,  
Bride, garden of loves like roses blowing.  
Bride, loveliest image of Paphos' Queen!  
So pass to the bride-bower, pass within  
To the nuptial couch, for the sweet bestowing  
On the bridegroom, whose measure is overflowing.  
Of the bliss, wherein honoured is Hera: 'tis owned  
Of the Marriage-goddess, the silver-throned.'

Sappho

# Anactoria

Yes, Atthis, you may be sure

Even in Sardis

Anactoria will think often of us

of the life we shared here, when you seemed  
the Goddess incarnate  
to her and your singing pleased her best

Now among Lydian women she in her  
turn stands first as the red-  
fingered moon rising at sunset takes

precedence over stars around her;  
her light spreads equally  
on the salt sea and fields thick with bloom

Delicious dew pours down to freshen  
roses, delicate thyme  
and blossoming sweet clover; she wanders

aimlessly, thinking of gentle  
Atthis, her heart hanging  
heavy with longing in her little breast

She shouts aloud, Come! we know it;  
thousand-eared night repeats that cry  
across the sea shining between us

Sappho

tr. Barnard

Sappho

# And Their Feet Move

And their feet move  
rhythmically, as tender  
feet of Cretan girls  
danced once around an

altar of love, crushing  
a circle in the soft  
smooth flowering grass

Sappho

# Awed By Her Splendor

Awed by her splendor  
stars near the lovely  
moon cover their own  
bright faces  
When she  
is roundest and lights  
earth with her silver

Sappho

# Before They Were Mothers

Before they were mothers  
Leto and Niobe  
had been the most  
devoted of friends

Sappho

# Blame Aphrodite

It's no use  
Mother dear, I  
can't finish my  
weaving  
    You may  
blame Aphrodite

soft as she is

she has almost  
killed me with  
love for that boy

Sappho  
tr. Barnard

Sappho

# Clais

I have a daughter,  
Clais fair,  
Poised like a golden flower in the air,  
Lydian treasures her limbs outshine  
(Clais, beloved one,  
Clais mine!)

Sappho

# Cleis

Sleep, darling  
I have a small  
daughter called  
Cleis, who is

like a golden  
flower

I wouldn't  
take all Croesus'  
kingdom with love  
thrown in, for her

---

Don't ask me what to wear  
I have no embroidered  
headband from Sardis to  
give you, Cleis, such as  
I wore

and my mother  
always said that in her  
day a purple ribbon  
looped in the hair was thought  
to be high style indeed

but we were dark:

a girl  
whose hair is yellower than  
torchlight should wear no  
headdress but fresh flowers

Sappho  
tr. Barnard

Sappho



# Cyprian, In My Dream

Cyprian, in my dream  
the folds of a purple  
kerchief shadowed  
your cheeks --- the one

Timas one time sent,  
a timid gift, all  
the way from Phocaea

Sappho  
tr. Barnard

Sappho

## Dica

With flowers fair adorn thy lustrous hair,  
Dica, amidst thy locks sweet blossoms twine,  
With thy soft hands, for so a maiden stands  
Accepted of the gods, whose eyes divine  
Are turned away from her--though fair as May  
She waits, but round whose locks no flowers shine.

Sappho

# Drapple-Thorned Aphrodite,

Dapple-throned Aphrodite,  
eternal daughter of God,  
snare-knitter! Don't, I beg you,

draw my heart with grief! Come,  
as once when you heard my far-  
off cry and, listening, stepped

from your father's house to your  
gold char, to yoke the pair whose  
beautiful thick-feathered wings

soaring down mid-air from heaven  
carried you to light swiftly  
on dark earth; then, blissful one,

smiling your immortal smile  
you asked, What ailed me now that  
me me call you again? What

was it that my distracted  
heart most wanted? "Whom has  
Persuasion to bring round now

"to your love? Who, Sappho, is  
unfair to you? For, let her  
run, she will soon run after;

"if she won't accept gifts, she  
will one day give them; and if  
she won't love you -- she soon will

"love, although unwillingly..."  
If ever -- come now! Relieve  
this intolerable pain!

What my heart most hopes will  
happen, make happen; you your-  
self join forces on my side!

Sappho

# Evening

Children astray to their mothers, and goats to the herd,  
Sheep to the shepherd, through twilight the wings of the bird,  
All things that morning has scattered with fingers of gold,  
All things thou bringest, O Evening! at last to the fold.

Sappho

# Grace

What country maiden charms thy heart,  
However fair, however sweet,  
Who has not learned by gracious Art  
To draw her dress around her feet?

Sappho

# He Is More Than A Hero

He is more than a hero  
he is a god in my eyes--  
the man who is allowed  
to sit beside you -- he

who listens intimately  
to the sweet murmur of  
your voice, the enticing

laughter that makes my own  
heart beat fast. If I meet  
you suddenly, I can'

speak -- my tongue is broken;  
a thin flame runs under  
my skin; seeing nothing,

hearing only my own ears  
drumming, I drip with sweat;  
trembling shakes my body

and I turn paler than  
dry grass. At such times  
death isn't far from me

Sappho

# Hesperus The Bringer

O Hesperus, thou bringest all good things--  
Home to the weary, to the hungry cheer,  
To the young bird the parent's brooding wings,  
The welcome stall to the o'erlabored steer;  
Whate'er our household gods protect of dear,  
Are gathered round us by thy look of rest;  
Thou bring'st the child too to its mother's breast.

Sappho



# Hymn To Aphrodite

Throned in splendor, immortal Aphrodite!  
Child of Zeus, Enchantress, I implore thee  
Slay me not in this distress and anguish,  
Lady of beauty.

Hither come as once before thou camest,  
When from afar thou heard'st my voice lamenting,  
Heard'st and camest, leaving thy glorious father's Palace golden,

Yoking thy chariot. Fair the doves that bore thee;  
Swift to the darksome earth their course directing,  
Waving their thick wings from the highest heaven  
Down through the ether.

Quickly they came. Then thou, O blessed goddess,  
All in smiling wreathed thy face immortal,  
Bade me tell thee the cause of all my suffering,  
Why now I called thee;

What for my maddened heart I most was longing.  
"Whom," thou criest, "dost wish that sweet Persuasion  
Now win over and lead to thy love, my Sappho?  
Who is it wrongs thee?

"For, though now he flies, he soon shall follow,  
Soon shall be giving gifts who now rejects them.  
Even though now he love not, soon shall he love thee  
Even though thou wouldst not."

Come then now, dear goddess, and release me  
From my anguish. All my heart's desiring  
Grant thou now. Now too again as aforetime,  
Be thou my ally.

Sappho

# I Have No Complaint

I have no complaint  
prosperity that  
the golden Muses  
gave me was no  
delusion: dead, I  
won't be forgotten

Sappho

# I Took My Lyre

I took my lyre and said:  
Come now, my heavenly  
tortoise shell: become  
a speaking instrument

Sappho  
tr. Barnard

Sappho

# I Took My Lyre And Said

I took my lyre and said:  
Come now, my heavenly  
tortoise shell: become  
a speaking instrument

Sappho

## In Adoration

Blest as the immortal gods is he,  
The youth whose eyes may look on thee,  
Whose ears thy tongue's sweet melody  
May still devour.

Thou smilest too!--sweet smile, whose charm  
Has struck my soul with wild alarm,  
And, when I see thee, bids disarm  
Each vital power.

Speechless I gaze: the flame within  
Runs swift o'er all my quivering skin:  
My eyeballs swim; with dizzy din  
My brain reels round;

And cold drops fall; and tremblings frail  
Seize every limb; and grassy pale  
I grow; and then--together fail  
Both sight and sound.

Sappho

# In The Spring Twilight

In the spring twilight  
the full moon is shining:  
Girls take their places  
as though around an altar

Sappho

# It Is The Muses

It is the Muses  
who have caused me  
to be honored: they  
taught me their craft

Sappho

# It Was You, Atthis, Who Said

It was you, Atthis, who said

"Sappho, if you will not get  
up and let us look at you  
I shall never love you again!

"Get up, unleash your suppleness,  
lift off your Chian nightdress  
and, like a lily leaning into

"a spring, bathe in the water.  
Cleis is bringing your best  
purple frock and the yellow

"tunic down from the clothes chest;  
you will have a cloak thrown over  
you and flowers crowning your hair...

"Praxinoa, my child, will you please  
roast nuts for our breakfast? One  
of the gods is being good to us:

"today we are going at last  
into Mitylene, our favorite  
city, with Sappho, loveliest

"of its women; she will walk  
among us like a mother with  
all her daughters around her

"when she comes home from exile..."

But you forget everything

Sappho



# It's No Use

It's no use  
Mother dear, I  
can't finish my  
weaving  
You may  
blame Aphrodite

soft as she is

she has almost  
killed me with  
love for that boy

Sappho

# Jealousy

He must feel blooded with the spirit of a god  
to sit opposite you and listen, and reply,  
to your talk, your laughter, your touching,  
breath-held silences. But what I feel, sitting here  
and watching you, so stops my heart and binds  
my tongue that I can't think what I might say  
to breach the aureole around you there.  
It's as if someone with flint and stone had sparked  
a fire that kindled the flesh along my arms  
and smothered me in its smoke-blind rush.  
Paler than summer grass, it seems  
I am already dead, or little short of dying.

Sappho

# Leto And Niobe

Before they were mothers  
Leto and Niobe  
had been the most  
devoted of friends

Sappho  
tr. Barnard

Sappho

## Like The Gods. . .

In my eyes he matches the gods, that man who  
sits there facing you--any man whatever--  
listening from closeby to the sweetness of your  
voice as you talk, the

sweetness of your laughter: yes, that--I swear it--  
sets the heart to shaking inside my breast, since  
once I look at you for a moment, I can't  
speak any longer,

but my tongue breaks down, and then all at once a  
subtle fire races inside my skin, my  
eyes can't see a thing and a whirring whistle  
thrums at my hearing,

cold sweat covers me and a trembling takes  
ahold of me all over: I'm greener than the  
grass is and appear to myself to be little  
short of dying.

But all must be endured, since even a poor [

Sappho

# Like The Sweet Apple

Like the sweet apple that reddens  
At end of the bough--  
Far end of the bough--  
Left by the gatherer's swaying,  
Forgotten, so thou.  
Nay, not forgotten, ungotten,  
Ungathered (till now).

Sappho

# Like the very gods in my sight is he

Like the very gods in my sight is he who  
sits where he can look in your eyes, who listens  
close to you, to hear the soft voice, its sweetness  
murmur in love and

laughter, all for him. But it breaks my spirit;  
underneath my breast all the heart is shaken.  
Let me only glance where you are, the voice dies,  
I can say nothing,

but my lips are stricken to silence, underneath  
my skin the tenuous flame suffuses;  
nothing shows in front of my eyes, my ears are  
muted in thunder.

And the sweat breaks running upon me, fever  
shakes my body, paler I turn than grass is;  
I can feel that I have been changed, I feel that  
death has come near me.

Translated by Richmond Lattimore

Sappho

# Loneliness

Set are the Pleiades; the Moon is down  
And midnight dark on high.  
The hours, the hours, drift by,  
And here I lie,  
Alone

Sappho

# Love

Sweet mother, at the idle loom I lean,  
Weary with longing for the boy that still  
Remains a dream of loveliness--to fill  
My soul, my life, at Aphrodite's will.

Sappho



# Maidens Dancing In Moonlight

Then, as the broad moon rose on high,  
The maidens stood the altar nigh;  
And some in graceful measure  
The well-loved spot danced round,  
With lightsome footsteps treading  
The soft and grassy ground.

Sappho

# Moonlight

The stars around the fair moon fade  
Against the night,  
When gazing full she fills the glade  
And spreads the seas with silvery light.

Sappho

# Mother, I Cannot Mind My Wheel

Mother, I cannot mind my wheel;  
My fingers ache, my lips are dry;  
Oh! if you felt the pain I feel!  
But oh, who ever felt as I!

Sappho

## Must I Remind You, Cleis,

Must I remind you, Cleis,  
that sounds of grief  
are unbecoming in  
a poet's household?

and that they are not  
suitable in ours?

[Note: "A poet's household" is more literally one "dedicated to the Muses."]

Sappho

## Must I Remind You, Cleis,

Must I remind you, Cleis,  
that sounds of grief  
are unbecoming in  
a poet's household?

and that they are not  
suitable in ours?

[Note: "A poet's household" is more literally one "dedicated to the Muses."]

Sappho

# My Garden

I've a garden, a garden of dreams,

Where the cool breeze whispering sways  
Softly the apple-sprays,

And from leaves that shimmer and quiver  
Down on mine eyelids streams  
A slumber-river.

Sappho

# No Word

I have had not one word from her

Frankly I wish I were dead.  
When she left, she wept

a great deal; she said to  
me, ``This parting must be  
endured, Sappho. I go unwillingly."

I said, ``Go, and be happy  
but remember (you know  
well) whom you leave shackled by love

`` If you forget me, think  
of our gifts to Aphrodite  
and all the loveliness that we shared

`` all the violet tiaras,  
braided rosebuds, dill and  
crocus twined around your young neck

`` myrrh poured on your head  
and on soft mats girls with  
all that they most wished for beside them

`` while no voices chanted  
choruses without ours,  
no woodlot bloomed in spring without song..."

Sappho  
tr. Barnard

Sappho

# Ode To A Loved One

LEST as the immortal gods is he,  
The youth who fondly sits by thee,  
And hears and sees thee, all the while,  
Softly speaks and sweetly smile.

'Twas this deprived my soul of rest,  
And raised such tumults in my breast;  
For, while I gazed, in transport tossed,  
My breath was gone, my voice was lost;

My bosom glowed; the subtle flame  
Ran quick through all my vital frame;  
O'er my dim eyes a darkness hung;  
My ears with hollow murmurs rung;

In dewy damps my limbs were chilled;  
My blood with gentle horrors thrilled:  
My feeble pulse forgot to play;  
I fainted, sunk, and died away.

Sappho



# Ode To Anactoria

That man, whoever he may be,  
Who sits awhile to gaze on thee,  
Hearing thy lovely laugh, thy speech,  
Throned with the gods he seems to me;  
For when a moment to mine eyes  
Thy form discloses, silently  
I stand consumed with fires that rise  
Like flames around a sacrifice.  
Sight have I none, bells out of tune  
Ring in mine ears, my tongue lies dumb;  
Paler than grass in later June,  
Yet daring all  
(To thee I come).

Sappho

# Ode To Aphrodite

Deathless Aphrodite, throned in flowers,  
Daughter of Zeus, O terrible enchantress,  
With this sorrow, with this anguish, break my spirit  
Lady, not longer!

Hear anew the voice! O hear and listen!  
Come, as in that island dawn thou camest,  
Billowing in thy yoked car to Sappho  
Forth from thy father's

Golden house in pity! ... I remember:  
Fleet and fair thy sparrows drew thee, beating  
Fast their wings above the dusky harvests,  
Down the pale heavens,

Lightning anon! And thou, O blest and brightest,  
Smiling with immortal eyelids, asked me:  
'Maiden, what betideth thee? Or wherefore  
Callest upon me?

'What is here the longing more than other,  
Here in this mad heart? And who the lovely  
One beloved that wouldst lure to loving?  
Sappho, who wrongs thee?

'See, if now she flies, she soon must follow;  
Yes, if spurning gifts, she soon must offer;  
Yes, if loving not, she soon must love thee,  
Howso unwilling...'

Come again to me! O now! Release me!  
End the great pang! And all my heart desireth  
Now of fulfillment, fulfill! O Aphrodite,  
Fight by my shoulder!

Sappho

# Of Course I Love You

Of course I love you  
but if you love me,  
marry a young woman!

I couldn't stand it  
to live with a young  
man, I being older

Sappho

# On The Tomb Of A Priestess Of Artemis

Voiceless I speak, and from the tomb reply  
Unto Æthopia, Leto's child, was I  
Vowed by the daughter of Hermocleides,  
Who was the son of Saonaiades.  
O virgin queen, unto my prayer incline,  
Bless him and cast thy blessing on our line.

Sappho

# On What Is Best

Some celebrate the beauty  
of knights, or infantry,  
or billowing flotillas  
at battle on the sea.  
Warfare has its glory,  
but I place far above  
these military splendors  
the one thing that you love.

For proof of this contention  
examine history:  
we all remember Helen,  
who left her family,  
her child, and royal husband,  
to take a stranger's hand:  
her beauty had no equal,  
but bowed to love's command.

As love then is the power  
that none can disobey,  
so too my thoughts must follow  
my darling far away:  
the sparkle of her laughter  
would give me greater joy  
than all the bronze-clad heroes

Sappho

# One Girl

I

Like the sweet apple which reddens upon the topmost bough,  
A-top on the topmost twig--which the pluckers forgot, somehow--  
Forget it not, nay, but got it not, for none could get it till now.

II

Like the wild hyacinth flower which on the hills is found,  
Which the passing feet of the shepherds for ever tear and wound,  
Until the purple blossom is trodden in the ground.

Sappho

# Orchard Song

Cool murmur of water through apple-wood  
Troughs without number  
The whole orchard fills, whilst the leaves  
Lend their music to slumber.

Sappho

# Prayer To Our Lady Of Paphos

Dapple-throned Aphrodite,  
eternal daughter of God,  
snare-knitter! Don't, I beg you,

cow my heart with grief! Come,  
as once when you heard my far-  
off cry and, listening, stepped

from your father's house to your  
gold car, to yoke the pair whose  
beautiful thick-feathered wings

oaring down mid-air from heaven  
carried you to light swiftly  
on dark earth; then, blissful one,

smiling your immortal smile  
you asked, What ailed me now that  
me call you again? What

was it that my distracted  
heart most wanted? `` Whom has  
Persuasion to bring round now

`` to your love? Who, Sappho, is  
unfair to you? For, let her  
run, she will soon run after;

`` if she won't accept gifts, she  
will one day give them; and if  
she won't love you --- she soon will

`` love, although unwillingly..."  
If ever --- come now! Relieve  
this intolerable pain!

What my heart most hopes will  
happen, make happen; you your-  
self join forces on my side!



Sappho  
tr. Barnard

Sappho

# Sappho To Her Girlfriends

Fragments 34, 77, 76, 61, 71, 48, 86, 83, 47, 129, and 32 combined.

This is my song of maidens dear to me.  
Eranna, a slight girl I counted thee,  
When first I looked upon thy form and face,  
Slim as a reed, and all devoid of grace.  
But stately stature, grace and beauty came  
Unto thee with the years — O, dost not shame  
For this, Eranna, that thy pride hath grown  
Therewith? Alas for thee ! I have not known  
One beauty ever of more scornful mien,  
As though thou wert of all earth's daughters queen!  
Mnasidica is comelier, perchance,  
Than my Gyrinna — ah, but sweetly rings  
Gyrinna's matchless voice ! In rapture-trance  
I listen, listen, while Gyrinna sings.  
Hero of Gyara is fleet of foot  
As fawns, and as light-footed in the dance,  
The dance taught by the measures of my lute.  
Ever-impassioned Gorgo! — is it strange  
That I grow weary of the change on change  
Of thine adored ones? — of thy rhapsodies  
O'er each new girlfriend, while the old love dies?  
Joy to thee, daughter of a princely race,  
For thy last dear one! Lie in her embrace —  
Till shines a new star on thy raptured eyes!  
Fonder of maids thou art, I trow, than she.  
The ghost who nightly steal young girls, to be  
In Hades of her woeful company.  
This is my fair girl-garden: sweet they grow —  
Rose, violet, asphodel and lily's snow;  
And which the sweetest is, I do not know;  
For rosy arms and starry eyes are there.  
Honey-sweet voices and cheeks passing fair.  
And these shall men, I ween, remember long;  
For these shall bloom for ever in my song.

Sappho

# Sleep, Darling

Sleep, darling  
I have a small  
daughter called  
Cleis, who is

like a golden  
flower  
I wouldn't  
take all Croesus'  
kingdom with love  
thrown in, for her

---

Don't ask me what to wear  
I have no embroidered  
headband from Sardis to  
give you, Cleis, such as  
I wore  
And my mother  
always said that in her  
day a purple ribbon  
looped in the hair was thought  
to be high style indeed

but we were dark:  
A girl  
whose hair is yellower than  
torchlight should wear no  
headdress but fresh flowers

Sappho

# Song Of The Rose

F Zeus chose us a King of the flowers in his mirth,  
He would call to the rose, and would royally crown it;  
For the rose, ho, the rose! is the grace of the earth,  
Is the light of the plants that are growing upon it!  
For the rose, ho, the rose! is the eye of the flowers,  
Is the blush of the meadows that feel themselves fair,  
Is the lightning of beauty that strikes through the bowers  
On pale lovers that sit in the glow unaware.  
Ho, the rose breathes of love! ho, the rose lifts the cup  
To the red lips of Cypris invoked for a guest!  
Ho, the rose having curled its sweet leaves for the world  
Takes delight in the motion its petals keep up,  
As they laugh to the wind as it laughs from the west.

Sappho

# Sounds Of Grief

Must I remind you, Cleis,  
that sounds of grief  
are unbecoming in  
a poet's household?

and that they are not  
suitable in ours?

Sappho  
tr. Barnard

Sappho

# Standing By My Bed

Standing by my bed  
in gold sandals  
Dawn that very  
moment awoke me

Sappho

# Tell Everyone

Tell everyone  
now, today, I shall  
sing beautifully for  
my friends' pleasure

Sappho

# The Anactoria Poem

Some say thronging cavalry, some say foot soldiers,  
others call a fleet the most beautiful of  
sights the dark earth offers, but I say it's what-  
ever you love best.

And it's easy to make this understood by  
everyone, for she who surpassed all human  
kind in beauty, Helen, abandoning her  
husband--that best of

men--went sailing off to the shores of Troy and  
never spent a thought on her child or loving  
parents: when the goddess seduced her wits and  
left her to wander,

she forgot them all, she could not remember  
anything but longing, and lightly straying  
aside, lost her way. But that reminds me  
now: Anactoria,

she's not here, and I'd rather see her lovely  
step, her sparkling glance and her face than gaze on  
all the troops in Lydia in their chariots and  
glittering armor.

Sappho



# The Arbor

He seems to be a god, that man  
Facing you, who leans to be close,  
Smiles, and, alert and glad, listens  
To your mellow voice

And quickens in love at your laughter  
That stings my breasts, jolts my heart  
If I dare the shock of a glance.  
I cannot speak,

My tongue sticks to my dry mouth,  
Thin fire spreads beneath my skin,  
My eyes cannot see and my aching ears  
Roar in their labyrinths.

Chill sweat glides down my back,  
I shake, I turn greener than grass.  
I am neither living nor dead and cry  
From the narrow between.

Sappho

# The Death Of Adonis

Fragments 108, 110, 115, 117, 116, 111, 114, and 113 combined.

This is the lamentation-song  
For Adonis — woe for Adonis, woe!  
Thus wailed Aphrodite in anguish-throe,  
As she strove to hold him back from death:  
'Let thine heart not faint, O love! Be strong!  
O me, it burns me, thy failing breath!  
It kindles through all my being a fire!  
My heart is aflame with despairing desire!'  
She calls to her Eros of golden wing,  
She bids him steep in the ice-cold spring  
Fine linen, and lay on Adonis' brow: —  
'O love, let its coolness revive thee now! . . .  
Vain, vain! — his eyes see me no more;  
They are fixed in a gaze upon Hades' door!  
They close — he sleeps — not the sleep of the dead!  
Hush, stir not a pebble with heedless tread!  
No, no! this is death! Now remaineth to me  
No sweetness on earth — nor honey nor bee!'

Sappho

## The Dust Of Timas

This dust was Timas; and they say  
That almost on her wedding day  
She found her bridal home to be  
The dark house of Persephone.

And many maidens, knowing then  
That she would not come back again,  
Unbound their curls; and all in tears,  
They cut them off with sharpened shears.

Sappho

# The Fisherman's Tomb

Over the fisher Pelagon Meniscus his father set  
The oar worn by the wave, the trap, and the fishing net;--  
For all men, and for ever, memorials there to be  
Of the luckless life of the fisher, the labourer of the sea.

Sappho

# The Moon

THE stars about the lovely moon  
Fade back and vanish very soon,  
When, round and full, her silver face  
Swims into sight, and lights all space

Sappho

# The Muses

It is the Muses  
who have caused me  
to be honored: they  
taught me their craft

Sappho  
tr. Barnard

Sappho

# The Silver Moon

The silver moon is set;  
The Pleiades are gone;  
Half the long night is spent, and yet  
I lie alone.

Sappho

# The Torments Of Love

Fragments 84, 45, 82, 36, 38, 37, 40, 80, 50, 55, and 42 combined.

O Queens of Song, descend from your home.  
From the golden halls of Olumpus on high!  
O shell divine, now, now become  
Voiceful, to utter mine heart's wild cry!  
O Calliope, vouchsafe thine aid  
Unto one whom the Muse of Love hath betrayed!  
Ah me, I know not what to do  
Who am wildered all, in a strait betwixt two!  
I cry from a homeless heart storm-tossed  
As a child for her mother, a young child lost.  
Yet not after all-unattainable things  
Do I strain, nor I hope on passion's wings  
To soar to the heavens' empyreal blue.  
But oh, I yearn, how I yearn to slake  
My thirst where Love's feet brush the dew!  
For he who the strength of the mighty can break,  
He whose bitter sweetness no tongue may tell,  
The dragon whose onslaught none may quell,  
Love — mine whole being doth Love's breath shake.

Ah, sleep I cannot: soft-cushioned bed  
Wooes never my wearied frame to sleep;  
No pillow brings rest to my throbbing head.  
From my couch, as one in a nightmare, I leap.  
Ever Eros is tossing to and fro  
My spirit, as when great storm-winds blow  
O'er a tempest-tormented mountain-steep,  
And down on its groaning oak-woods sweep;  
So groaneth my spirit, love-scourged so.

Sappho



# Thy Form Is Lovely

Thy form is lovely and thine eyes are honeyed,  
O'er thy face the pale  
Clear light of love lies like a veil.  
Bidding thee rise,  
With outstretched hands,  
Before thee Aphrodite stands.

Sappho

## To A Bride

Bride, around whom the rosy leaves are flying,  
Sweet image of the Cyprian undying,  
The bed awaits thee; go, and with him lying,  
Give to the groom thy sweetness, softly sighing.  
May Hesperus in gladness pass before thee,  
And Hera of the silver throne bend o'er thee.

Sappho

## To A Girl In A Garden

O soft and dainty maiden, from afar  
I watch you, as amidst the flowers you move,  
And pluck them, singing.

More golden than all gold your tresses are:  
Never was harp-note like your voice, my love,  
Your voice sweet-ringing.

Sappho

# To A Rich Vulgarian

Fragments 35, 67, 81, 72, 68 combined.

Thou fool — that thou shouldst plume thyself  
On rich attire, on jewel-hoard,  
On dross of thine ill-gotten pelf,  
On carcanet and flashing ring,  
On meats and wines that load thy board!  
Ay, cup on cup past numbering  
Thou drainest with the drunken! Fool,  
Who hast not learnt in wisdom's school  
That wealth is an accursed thing  
Dislinked from goodness! Only when  
These twain are wedded, happiness  
True and abiding comes to bless  
The fleeting life of dying men.  
Fool! — yet not as in wrath I speak:  
Not I on thee would vengeance wreak.  
A quiet spirit dwells in me  
That scorns to bruise such worms as thee.  
Nay, but the inevitable Fate  
Even now decrees thine after-state: —  
When thou art dead, so shalt thou lie  
Ever: thy very name shall die.  
Thy sordid story not outlast  
Thy burial; for no part thou hast  
In Song-land's roses, whose perfume  
Breathes life immortal, o'er the tomb  
Triumphant. Unregarded all  
Shalt thou stray lost in Hades' hall  
Amidst the fameless dead forlorn,  
A vile, ignoble thing of scorn!

Sappho

# To A Youth Who Wooed A Woman Older Than Himself

Friend, woo me not so earnestly.  
Vain is thy prayer.  
Nay, if in truth thou lovest me.  
Hereafter spare  
My wearied ears a suit denied.  
Go, choose for thee a younger bride.  
Not I will brook to live with thee.  
An old wife to a young man tied,  
Doomed as the years fleet by to see  
A spouse who gazes hungry-eyed  
On such as she can never be.  
The young and fair.  
And waits to enshroud her clay with glee,  
And graveward bear.

Sappho

# To Anactoria, Who Has Forsaken A Once-Loved Girlfriend Of Sappho

Rushing war-hosts, horsemen or foot or galleys —  
These doth one call, those doth another, fairest  
Sights on earth: I say that my love of all is  
Sweetest and rarest.

Hear the proof, which lightly, I wot, convinces: —  
'Mid the comely, Helen would fain discover  
One without peer, and of the goodly princes  
Chose for her lover  
Him who brought the glory of Troy to ruin!  
Reckless all of parent and child, she lavished  
On the alien love for her own undoing;  
Troyward was ravished.

Anactoria — she who contemns the blessing  
Near at hand, is like to a reed wind-shaken.  
Such are you! — love held in secure possessing  
You have forsaken.

Her whose footfall's music myself had rather  
Hear, and see her face in its beauty beaming.  
Than to gaze where horsemen and footmen gather  
Panoply-gleaming.  
What is best is set above man's attaining;  
Yet, if Fortune smiled on us once, 'tis better  
To recall with prayer and with upward-straining  
Than to forget her.

Sappho

# To Any Army Wife

To any army wife, in Sardis:

Some say a cavalry corps,  
some infantry, some again,  
will maintain that the swift oars

of our fleet are the finest  
sight on dark earth; but I say  
that whatever one loves, is.

This is easily proved: did  
not Helen --- she who had scanned  
the flower of the world's manhood ---

choose as first among men one  
who laid Troy's honor in ruin?  
warped to his will, forgetting

love due her own blood, her own  
child, she wandered far with him.  
So Anactoria, although you

being far away forget us,  
the dear sound of your footstep  
and light glancing in your eyes

would move me more than glitter  
of Lydian horse or armored  
tread of mainland infantry

Sappho  
tr. Barnard

Sappho

# To Aphrodite

You know the place: then  
Leave Crete and come to us  
waiting where the grove is  
pleasantest, by precincts

sacred to you; incense  
smokes on the altar, cold  
streams murmur through the

apple branches, a young  
rose thicket shades the ground  
and quivering leaves pour

down deep sleep; in meadows  
where horses have grown sleek  
among spring flowers, dill

scents the air. Queen! Cyprian!  
Fill our gold cups with love  
stirred into clear nectar

Sappho  
tr. Barnard

Sappho



# To Atthis The Inconstant

Fragments 33, 57A, 44, 41, 70, 58 combined.

I loved thee, Atthis, — even thee! —

Ah, long ago!  
As Aphrodite's handmaid bright  
As gold wert thou then in my sight.  
A very queen of love to me

Then didst thou show.  
Fair gifts I sent thee — 'broidery  
Of golden thread whose shimmering light  
Flashed mid the purple on thy knee,

A gleam and glow.  
Then I knew not thine heart aright:

But now I know!  
Thou incarnate false inconstancy —

To whom I grow  
A thing to hate! — thou takest flight  
On wings of love to — who is she?  
A rustic wench whose garments flow  
About her heels ungracefully!

O yea, let thy false love requite  
Andromeda's worship! Take delight  
In her — thou who from my love's height  
Hast sunk so low!

Sappho

# To Evening

O HESPERUS! Thou bringest all things home;  
All that the garish day hath scattered wide;  
The sheep, the goat, back to the welcome fold;  
Thou bring'st the child, too, to his mother's side

Sappho

# To One False In Love

O false as fair  
I am forgotten, then, by thee!  
Or haply on another shine  
The eyes that once looked into mine  
Pretence of love — all faithlessly

Out! nought I care  
For such as can true love betray!  
Love on, forsworn, your little day:

Ye are nought to me.

Sappho

## To One Who Loved Not Poetry

THOU liest dead, and there will be no memory left behind  
Of thee or thine in all the earth, for never didst thou bind  
The roses of Pierian streams upon thy brow; thy doom  
Is now to flit with unknown ghosts in cold and nameless gloom.

Sappho

# Tonight I've Watched

Tonight I've watched  
the moon and then  
the Pleiades  
go down

The night is now  
half-gone; youth  
goes; I am

in bed alone

Sappho

# We Know This Much

We know this much  
Death is an evil;  
we have the gods'  
word for it; they too  
would die if death  
were a good thing

Sappho

# We Put The Urn Aboard Ship

We put the urn aboard ship  
with this inscription:

This is the dust of little  
Timas who unmarried was led  
into Persephone's dark bedroom

And she being far from home, girls  
her age took new-edged blades  
to cut, in mourning for her,  
these curls of their soft hair

Sappho

# We Shall Enjoy It

We shall enjoy it  
as for him who finds  
fault, may silliness  
and sorrow take him!

Sappho



# Wedding Song

Workmen lift high  
The beams of the roof,  
Hymenæus!

Like Ares from sky  
Comes the groom to the bride,  
Hymenæus!

Than men who must die  
Stands he taller in pride,  
Hymenæus!

Sappho

# With His Venom

With his venom  
irresistible  
and bittersweet

that loosener  
of limbs, Love

reptile-like  
strikes me down

Sappho

# Without Warning

Without warning  
as a whirlwind  
swoops on an oak  
Love shakes my heart

Sappho

# Words

Although they are  
only breath, words  
which I command  
are immortal

Sappho  
tr. Barnard

Sappho

# Yea, Thou Shalt Die

Yea, thou shalt die,  
And lie  
Dumb in the silent tomb;  
Nor to thy name  
Shall there be any fame  
In ages yet to be or years to come:  
For of the flowering Rose,  
Which on Pieria blows,  
Thou hast no share:  
But in sad Hades' house,  
Unknown, inglorious,  
'Mid the dim shades that wander there  
Shalt thou flit forth and haunt the filmy air.

Sappho

# Yes, Atthis, You May Be Sure

Yes, Atthis, you may be sure

Even in Sardis  
Anactoria will think often of us

of the life we shared here, when you seemed  
the Goddess incarnate  
to her and your singing pleased her best

Now among Lydian women she in her  
turn stands first as the red-  
fingered moon rising at sunset takes

precedence over stars around her;  
her light spreads equally  
on the salt sea and fields thick with bloom

Delicious dew purs down to freshen  
roses, delicate thyme  
and blossoming sweet clover; she wanders

aimlessly, thinking of gentle  
Atthis, her heart hanging  
heavy with longing in her little breast

She shouts aloud, Come! we know it;  
thousand-eared night repeats that cry  
across the sea shining between us

Sappho

# You Know The Place: Then

You know the place: then  
Leave Crete and come to us  
waiting where the grove is  
pleasantest, by precincts

sacred to you; incense  
smokes on the altar, cold  
streams murmur through the

apple branches, a young  
rose thicket shades the ground  
and quivering leaves pour

down deep sleep; in meadows  
where horses have grown sleek  
among spring flowers, dill

scents the air. Queen! Cyprian!  
Fill our gold cups with love  
stirred into clear nectar

Sappho

# You May Forget But

You may forget but  
let me tell you  
this: someone in  
some future time  
will think of us

Sappho



## Youth And Age

If love thou hast for me, not hate,  
Arise and find a younger mate;  
For I no longer will abide  
Where youth and age lie side by side.

Sappho