



**Sappho**

**Poetic Fragments**

**Translated by DW Myatt**

**Prefatory Note**

The aim of the present translation is to try and present something of the unadorned beauty of Sappho's Greek.

From the many fragments that remain of her poetry, I have chosen those that in my fallible opinion best reflect something of this beauty. The text used is that of Lobel and Page [ *Poetarium Lesbiorum Fragmenta*, Oxford 1955 ] - and the numbering of the Fragments in this present work follows that of their text.

.... in the text indicates a break in the fragment; [ ] indicates a conjecture.

DW Myatt  
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### **Fragment 1**

Deathless Aphrodite - Daughter of Zeus and maker of snares -  
On your florid throne, hear me!  
My lady, do not subdue my heart by anguish and pain  
But come to me as when before  
You heard my distant cry, and listened:  
Leaving, with your golden chariot yoked, your father's house  
To move beautiful sparrows swift with a whirling of wings  
As from heaven you came to this dark earth through middle air  
And so swiftly arrived.

Then you my goddess with your immortal lips smiling  
Would ask what now afflicts me, why again  
I am calling and what now I with my restive heart  
Desired:

Whom now shall I beguile  
To bring you to her love?  
Who now injures you, Sappho?  
For if she flees, soon shall she chase  
And, rejecting gifts, soon shall she give.  
If she does not love you, she shall do so soon  
Whatsoever is her will.

Come to me now to end this consuming pain  
Bringing what my heart desires to be brought:  
Be yourself my ally in this fight.

### **Fragment 16**

For some - it is horsemen; for others - it is infantry;  
For some others - it is ships which are, on this black earth,  
Visibly constant in their beauty. But for me,  
It is that which you desire.

To all, it is easy to make this completely understood  
For Helen - she who greatly surpassed other mortals in beauty -  
Left her most noble man and sailed forth to Troy  
Forgetting her beloved parents and her daughter  
Because [ the goddess ] led her away ....

Which makes me to see again Anactoria now far distant:  
For I would rather behold her pleasing, graceful movement  
And the radiant splendour of her face

Than your Lydian chariots and foot-soldiers in full armour ....

**Fragment 22**

Gather your [ lyre ] and sing for me  
[ Soon ]  
As desire once again [ enhances ] your beauty:

Your dress excites, and I rejoice  
For I once doubted Aphrodite  
But now have asked that soon  
You will be with me again ....

**Fragment 31**

I see he who sits near you as an equal of the gods  
For he can closely listen to your delightful voice  
And that seductive laugh  
That makes the heart behind my breasts to tremble.

Even when I glimpse you for a moment  
My tongue is stilled as speech deserts me  
While a delicate fire is beneath my skin -  
My eyes cannot see, then,  
When I hear only a whirling sound  
As I shivering, sweat  
Because all of me trembles;  
I become paler than drought-grass  
And nearer to death ...

**Fragment 34**

Awed by her brightness  
Stars near the beautiful moon  
Cover their own shining faces  
When she lights earth  
With her silver brilliance  
Of love ....

**Fragment 23**

When I look at you  
I know that even Hermione  
Was not such as you -  
Fairer to compare you to Helen  
The golden-haired ....

**Fragment 41**

Beautiful girls, towards you  
My thoughts will never change ....

**Fragment 47**

Love shook my heart  
Like the mountain wind  
Falls upon trees of oak ....

**Fragment 94**

I can reveal to you that I wished to die -  
For with much weeping she left me  
Saying: "Sappho - what suffering is ours!  
For it is against my will that I leave you."  
In answer, I said: "Go, happily remembering me  
For you know what we shared and pursued -  
If not, I wish you to see again our [ former joys ] .....  
The many braids of rose and violet you [ wreathed ]  
Around yourself at my side  
And the many garlands of flowers  
With which you adorned your soft neck:  
With royal oils from [ fresh flowers ]  
You anointed [ yourself ]  
And on soft beds fulfilled your longing  
[ For me ] ....

**Fragment 96**

She honoured you like a goddess  
And delighted in your choral dance.  
Now she is pre-eminent among the ladies of Lydia  
As the rose-rayed moon after the sinking of the Sun  
Surpasses all the stars and spreads it's light upon the sea  
And the flowers of the fields  
To beautify the spreading dew, freshen roses  
Soft chervil and the flowering melilot .....

Restless, she remembers gentle Atthis -  
Perhaps her subtle judgement is burdened

By your [ fate ] .....

For us, it is not easy to approach  
Goddesses in the beauty of their form  
But you ....

**Fragment 58**

Age seizes my skin and turns my hair  
From black to white:  
My knees no longer bear me  
And I am unable to dance again  
Like a fawn.

What could I do? I am not ageless:  
My youth is gone.  
Red-robed Dawn, immortal goddess,  
Carried [ Tithonus ] to earth's end  
Yet age seized him  
Despite the gift from his immortal lover ....

I love delicate softness:  
For me, love has brought the brightness  
And the beauty of the sun ....

**Fragment 126**

May you sleep on the breasts  
Of your tender companion ....

**Fragment 130**

Once again, desire -  
That looser of limbs and bitterly sweet -  
Makes me to tremble  
You are irresistible ....

**Fragment 138/147**

Believe me, in the future someone  
Will remember us .....

Because you love me  
Stand with me face to face  
And unveil the softness in your eyes .....

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cc David Wulstan Myatt 1986, 2017

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