

IF NOT, WINTER

FRAGMENTS OF SAPPHO

TRANSLATED

BY

ANNE CARSON



VINTAGE BOOKS

A DIVISION OF RANDOM HOUSE, INC.

NEW YORK

SAPPHO

16

Οἱ μὲν ἱππῶν στροτόν, οἱ δὲ πῆδων,
οἱ δὲ νᾶων φαῖς ἐπ[ι] γᾶν μέλαι[ν]αν
ἔμμεναι κάλλιστον, ἔγω δὲ κῆν' ὅτ—
τω τις ἔραται·

πάλγῃ δ' εὐμαρες σύνετον πόησαι
πλάντι τ[ο]ῦτ', ἃ γὰρ πόλυ περσκέθοισα
κάλλος ἀνθρώπων Ἑλένα τὸν ἄνδρα
τὸν [αἰχιστον

καλλι[ί]ποις ἔβα 'ς Τροίαν πλέοι[σα
κωῦδ[ε] πα[ί]δος οὐδὲ φίλων τοκλήων
πά[μ]παν ἐμνάσθη, ἀλλὰ παράγαγ' αὐτὰν
[σαν

λαμπτον γὰρ [
]...κούφωσι []οη[.]. [
]με νῦν Ἀνακτορί[ας] ὀλέμεναι—
ς' οὐ] παροίσας,

16

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

Easy to make this understood by all.
For she who overcame everyone
in beauty (Helen)
left her fine husband

behind and went sailing to Troy.
Not for her children nor her dear parents
had she a thought, no—
[led her astray

[for
[lightly

[reminded me now of Anaktori
who is gone.

τὰς κωε βολλοίμαν ἔρατόν τε βᾶμα
κάμαρυγμα λάμπρον ἴδην προσώπω
ἢ τὰ Λύδων ἄρματα κᾶν ὄπλοισι
πεσδομ]άχεντας.

]μεν οὐ δύνατον γένεσθαι
].ν ἀνθρωπ[. .(.) π]εδέχην δ' ἄρασθαι

[]
[]
[]
[]
[]

προς[

ὥςδ[

..]. [

.]. []ωλ. [

τ' ἐξ ἀδοκή[τω.

I would rather see her lovely step
and the motion of light on her face
than chariots of Lydians or ranks
of footsoldiers in arms.

]not possible to happen
]to pray for a share

]

]

]

]

]

toward[

]

]

]

out of the unexpected.

SAPPHO

31

Φαίνεται μοι κῆνος ἴσος θεοῖσιν
ἔμμεν' ὤνηρ, ὅττις ἐνάντιός τοι
ἰσδάνει καὶ πλάσιον ἄδυ φωνεῖ-
σας ὑπακούει

καὶ γελαίσας ἡμέροεν, τό μ' ἦ μὰν *suites*
καρδίαν ἐν στήθεσιν ἐπτόαισεν *wits*
ὥς γὰρ <ἔς> σ' ἴδω βρόχε' ὥς με φώνη-
ς' οὐδὲν ἔτ' εἴκει,

ἀλλὰ καμὲν γλῶσσαν ἔαγε, λεπτόν
δ' αὐτίκα χρωὶ πῦρ ὑπαδεδρόμακεν,
ὁππάτεσσι δ' οὐδὲν ὄρημ', ἐπιβρό-
μεις δ' ἄκουαι,

ἔκαδε μ' ἴδρως κακχέεται, τρόμος δὲ
παῖσαν ἄγρει, χλωροτιέρεα δὲ πλοίας
ἔμμι, τεθινάκην δ' ὀλίγω 'πιδειύης
φαίνομαι ἔμ' αὖτις.

ἀλλὰ πὰν τόλματον, ἐπεὶ καὶ πένητα

31

He seems to me equal to gods that man
whoever he is who opposite you
sits and listens close
to your sweet speaking

and lovely laughing—oh it
puts the heart in my chest on wings
for when I look at you, even a moment, no speaking
is left in me

no: tongue breaks and thin
fire is racing under skin
and in eyes no sight and drumming
fills ears

and cold sweat holds me and shaking
grips me all, greener than grass
I am and dead—or almost
I seem to me.

But all is to be dared, because even a person of poverty

ΣΑΡΡΗΤΟ

ὅπταις ἄμμε

you burn me

SAPPHO

98A

...].θος· ἃ γάρ μ' ἐγέννα[τ

ς]φᾶς ἐπ' ἀλικίας μέγ[αν·
κ]όςμον αἴ τις ἔχη φόβα[ις]
πορφύρῳ κατελιξαμέ[να

ἔμμεναι μάλα τοῦτο· [
ἄλλα ξανθοτέραις ἔχη[
ταῖς νόμα[ις δαΐδος προφ[

ς]τεφάνοισιν ἐπαρτία[ις
ἀνθέων ἐριθαλέων· [
μ]ιτράναν δ' ἀρτίως κλ[

ποικίλαν ἀπὸ Καρδίων
...].αονίας πόλ[ε]ις [
...]

98A

]for my mother

in her youth it was a great
ornament if someone had hair
bound with purple—

a very great ornament indeed
But for the one who has hair yellower
than a pinetorch

crowns
of blooming flowers
and just lately a headbinder

spangled from Sardis
]cities

SAPPHO

118

ἄγι δὴ χέλυ διὰ μοι λέγε
φωνάεσσα δὲ γίνεω

118

yes! radiant lyre speak to me
become a voice

SAPPHO

120

ἀλλά τις οὐκ ἔμμι παλιγκότων
ὄργαν, ἀλλ' ἀβάκην τὰν φρέν' ἔχω

120

but I am not someone who likes to wound
rather I have a quiet mind

SAPPHO

125

αυτάόρα ἔςτεφαναπλόκην

254

125

I used to weave crowns

255

SAPPHO

Ἔρος δηὐτέ μ' ὁ λυσιμέλης δόνει,
 γλυκύπικρον ἀμάχανον ὄρπετον

Eros the mēlter of limbs (now again) stirs me—
sweetbitter unmanageable creature who steals in

SAPPHO

138

στᾶθι κᾶντα φίλος
καὶ τὰν ἐπ' ὄψεσιν ὀμπέτασον χάριν

138

stand to face me beloved
and open out the grace of your eyes

SAPPHO

146

μήτε μοι μέλι μήτε μέλισσα

294

146

neither for me honey nor the honey bee

295

SAPPHO

147

μνάσασθαι τινα φαῖμι καὶ ἕτερον ἀμμέων

147

someone will remember us

I say

even in another time

]

SAPPHO

168B

Δέδυκε μὲν ἃ ζελάνα
καὶ Πληΐαδες· μέσαι δὲ
νύκτες, παρὰ δ' ἔρχετ' ὥρα,
ἔγω δὲ μόνῃ κατεύδω.

168B

Moon has set
and Pleiades: middle
night, the hour goes by,
alone I lie.

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

For over 100 years Oxford World's Classics have brought readers closer to the world's great literature. Now with over 700 titles—from the 4,000-year-old myths of Mesopotamia to the twentieth century's greatest novels—the series makes available lesser-known as well as celebrated writing.

The pocket-sized hardbacks of the early years contained introductions by Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, Graham Greene, and other literary figures which enriched the experience of reading.

Today the series is recognized for its fine scholarship and reliability in texts that span world literature, drama and poetry, religion, philosophy and politics. Each edition includes perceptive commentary and essential background information to meet the changing needs of readers.

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

Greek Lyric Poetry

The poems and fragments of the Greek iambic, elegiac, and melic poets (excluding Pindar and Bacchylides) down to 450 BC

Translated with an Introduction and Notes by
M. L. WEST

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

- 7 . . . making a wailing funeral chorus, they and
their wives,
when one of their masters met his destiny.
- 10 For it is fine to die in the front line,
a brave man fighting for his fatherland,
and the most painful fate's to leave one's town
and fertile farmlands for a beggar's life,
roaming with mother dear and aged father,
with little children and with wedded wife.
He'll not be welcome anywhere he goes,
bowing to need and horrid poverty,
his line disgraced, his handsome face belied;
every humiliation dogs his steps.
This is the truth: the vagrant is ignored
and slighted, and his children after him.
So let us fight with spirit for our land,
die for our sons, and spare our lives no more.
You young men, keep together, hold the line,
do not start panic or disgraceful rout.
Keep grand and valiant spirits in your hearts,
be not in love with life—the fight's with men!
Do not desert your elders, men with legs
no longer nimble, by recourse to flight:
it is disgraceful when an older man
falls in the front line while the young hold back,
with head already white, and grizzled beard,
gasping his valiant breath out in the dust
and clutching at his bloodied genitals,
his nakedness exposed: a shameful sight
and scandalous. But for the young man, still
in glorious prime, it is all beautiful:
alive, he draws men's eyes and women's hearts;
felled in the front line, he is lovely yet.
Let every man then, feet set firm apart,
bite on his lip and stand against the foe.
- 11 But Heracles unvanquished sowed your stock:
take heart! Zeus bows not yet beneath the yoke.
Fear not the throng of men, turn not to flight,
but straight toward the front line bear your
shields,

- despising life and welcoming the dark
contingencies of death like shafts of sun.
You know what wreck the woeful War-god makes,
and are well to the grim fight's temper tuned.
You have been with pursuers and pursued,
you young men, and had bellyful of both.
You know that those who bravely hold the line
and press toward engagement at the front
die in less numbers, with the ranks behind
protected; those who run, lose all esteem.
The list is endless of the ills that hurt
the man who learns to think the coward's
thoughts:
for it's a bad place, as he flees the fray,
to have his wound, between the shoulder-blades,
and it's a shameful sight to see him lie
dead in the dust, the spear-point in his back.
Let every man, then, feet set firm apart,
bite on his lip and stand against the foe,
his thighs and shins, his shoulders and his chest
all hidden by the broad bulge of his shield.
Let his right hand brandish the savage lance,
the plume nod fearsomely above his head.
By fierce deeds let him teach himself to fight,
and not stand out of fire—he has a shield—
but get in close, engage, and stab with lance
or sword, and strike his adversary down.
Plant foot by foeman's foot, press shield on shield,
thrust helm at helm, and tangle plume with
plume,
opposing breast to breast: that's how to fight,
with the long lance or sword-grip in your hand.
You light-armed men, wherever you can aim
from the shield-cover, pelt them with great rocks
and hurl at them your smooth-shaved javelins,
helping the armoured troops with close support.
- 12 I would not rate a man worth mention or account
either for speed of foot or wrestling skill,
not even if he had a Cyclops' size and strength
or could outrun the fierce north wind of Thrace;

MIMNERMUS

- 1 What's life, what's joy, without love's heavenly
gold?
I hope I die when I no longer care
for secret closeness, tender favours, bed,
which are the rapturous flowers that grace
youth's prime
for men and women. But when painful age
comes on, that makes a man loathsome and vile,
malignant troubles ever vex his heart;
seeing the sunlight gives him joy no more.
He is abhorred by boys, by women scorned:
so hard a thing God made old age to be.
- 2 But we are like the leaves that flowery spring
puts forth, quick spreading in the sun's warm light:
for a brief span of time we take our joy
in our youth's bloom, the future, good or ill,
kept from us, while the twin dark Dooms stand by,
one bringing to fulfilment harsh old age,
the other, death. The ripeness of youth's fruit
is short, short as the sunlight on the earth,
and once this season of perfection's past,
it's better to be dead than stay alive.
All kinds of worry come. One man's estate
is failing, and there's painful poverty;
another has no sons—the keenest need
one feels as one goes down below the earth;
sickness wears down another's heart. There's none
Zeus does not give a multitude of ills.
- 3 Most handsome once, perhaps, but when his
season's past,
he's loathed and slighted even by his sons.
- 4 He gave Tithonus* an unending bane,
old age, that is more frightful than harsh death.
- 5 The sweat runs down me, and my heart's a-flutter,
seeing my generation in its bloom

MIMNERMUS

29

- of joy and beauty. Oh, it ought to last
for longer! But it's fleeting as a dream,
our precious youth; in no time ugly, harsh,
hateful old age is looming over us,
unvalued, that enveloping deforms
past recognition, dims both sight and mind.
- 6 I pray my fated death may catch me
hale and hearty at threescore years.
 - 7 Enjoy yourself. As for the wretched townisfolk,
some will speak ill of you—but only some.
 - 8 Let us be honest, you and me.
It is the rightest thing to be.
 - 9 Aipy we left,* and Neleus' city, Pylos,
and came by ship to Asia's lovely coast.
We settled at fair Colophon with rude
aggression, bringers of harsh insolence;
from there we crossed the river Asteïs (?)
and took Aeolian Smyrna by God's will.
- 11, 11a Jason would not have brought that great fleece* home
from Aea at the end of that ordeal
he suffered for the arrogant Pelias;
they'd not have reached the river of World's End.
- Aeetes' city, where the swift sun's rays
are stored in a gold chamber by the edge
of the world stream, where godlike Jason went.
- 12 The sun must toil along day after day:
there's never any break or rest for him
or for his horses, once rosefinger Dawn
leaves the world stream and climbs into the sky.
A wondrous couch bears him across the waves—
winged, by Hephaestus intricately wrought
in precious gold—as he in grateful sleep
skims o'er the sea from the Hesperides
to Aethiopia,* where a chariot
and steeds await the early birth of Dawn;
and there the god mounts his new equipage,
Hyperion's son.