

A woman's voice: the poems of sappho of lesbos

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



`A Woman's Voice: The Poems of Sappho of Lesbos(6th Century B. C.)`

Sappho Translated by Stanley Lombardo Alley Miller- HIS 100 - Mid-Term

Exam Essay `Sappho of Lesbos lived in a time in Greece where we have very little record of female accomplishments. Her poetry influenced stylistic poetry of the time and can be compared in composition and style to Elizabeth Barrett Browning or Richard Brautigan of a more modern era.

Perhaps, what may be most notable about Sappho is that not only did her work influence poets much later, but they were widely "revered throughout the ancient world", even when many more modern female poets were looked down on with disdain. One must ask, while reviewing her work: what can we learn about Sappho's life, the historical context in which she lived, and the influence of her status as a woman from her poetry? `Many poets through history have concealed their true sexual identity to achieve a status of acceptance in the greater population, but there is no indication in Sappho's poems that would lead us to believe she made a similar choice. In addition, other than the possible inclinations toward an attraction toward other women, her poetry is vastly conforming to the feminine idea. She did not fight to hide her sexuality or her gender. This speaks to the reader that, perhaps, ancient Greece was widely liberal views of sexuality. Obvious reference to female-female affection, yet still openly accepted by her peers.

This affection did not conform to the "heterosexual role stereotype" that many same sex relationships depicted by other sources conform to. This heterosexual role idea usually dictates that no matter the gender of two lovers one must adhere to the masculine role while the other to the feminine. ` `In Sappho's poetry we do not see this. Throughout, her poetry

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she focuses largely on women, referring to: Aphrodite, a female lover, the women that surround soldiers, and Helen of Troy. She describes each as having feminine qualities with beauty, gentility, and fragility.

However, she still describes herself with the same qualities and even humbles herself by begging the god Aphrodite and bolsters male dominance in Poem 20 by referring to the man that seems to be in possession of her lover as "just like a god". This phrase and this poem as a whole indicate that, while homosexual relationships may be accepted, one must ultimately put a heterosexual one first. The poet did not fight to hide her gender and wrote in a very soft, feminine way. She did not convey a feeling of dominance or toughness, but rather a soft, sweet, almost timid, connotation.

Even when speaking of wars, she does it with certain subtleness that suggests beauty braiding in images like "delicate", "gliding", "flute's melody", and focused on the sweet senses. Sappho was "A Woman's Voice" in a time where most other women's voices were blotted out. She was praised even during her time, while some similar modern poets were forced to conceal for success. This says something about the time in which she lived: that while it was undoubtedly male dominated there must have been some level of female acceptance and worth.