

Who could she have been,—the lyric figure
And the pure-toned speech? She spoke of Phaon,
And, I fancied, called her comrade Gorgo.
(Here another passer-by, a young girl,
Radiant and eager to her comrade:
"Have you heard the latest songs of Sappho?")
Sappho's very self! And we have seen her;
Heard the golden accent clear and gracious,
Caught the girlish poise of head and shoulder
And the lithe step free from throat to sandal.
Is not that enough for one day's outing?
Let's home now and ask our lodging keeper
More exact report of these new lyrics.

Think of finding one of those lost love-songs
From the books of Sappho, which for ages
Men have hedged about with golden rumor!
Or if one should stumble on some cadence,
Turn of phrase, or hint of magic beauty
Heard not save within these vanished volumes!
Ah, not I! The letter and the substance
Of that noble tongue may live forever;
But the lyric soul that breathed across it,
As a god might blow his silver syrinx
With a magic past the reach of mortals,
Shall no more revisit with enchantment
Human dwellings nor the hearts of lovers.

Yet if, here and now, a sheer invention
Just to pass an idle week of Summer,
One should dare contrive a book of lyrics,
With the names of Sappho and of Phaon,
Atthis, Dica, Gorgo and Gyrinna,
And among the latest novels leave it
On your table with some trepidation,
Would you not, if only for the sake of
That Greek woman long ago in Lesbos,
Turn the leaves and read, as in a play-book
Long forgotten, here and there a lyric?

Here it lies at last within your hand, then,
Just a fragmentary page of story,
Torn across, imperfect, and unfinished,
From the Golden History of Lovers.
Let me trust your passion for the drama,
Love of poetry, and Celtic insight,
To make good the scanty text; and read it
As you would a part, with intuition