Honors 201: Inquiries in the Ancient World  
Parody: Analysis  
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As the author of some of the oldest surviving works of poetry, Sappho has garnered a great deal of respect over the ages, and with good reason. Hailing from the day of the lyric poem- poetry performed accompaniment by a musical instrument called the lyre- the poetry of Sappho is characterized by significant gravity and generally revolves around the more serious of human themes: the myriad facets of gods, goddesses, spirituality, death, loss, grief, life, admiration, love, social upheaval, and other qualities of humanity and human relationships all find their representation in Sappho’s poems. As is true of most renowned poets and authors, Sappho’s work is not free from controversy; themes considered by some to be of a homosexual nature have resulted in Sappho’s work being periodically banned and destroyed throughout the past.

As has been demonstrated, the work of Sappho is nothing to scoff at, and is most definitely not a joke. Or is it? Her work is certainly nothing to scoff at, but one would do well to realize that even the most sincere of artistic representations cannot be wholly removed from the realm of humor. Sappho’s work is heralded as being of a poignantly human nature, but this praise is usually directed to the somber aspects of the work. However, with some quick introspection, it becomes clear that one of the most truly unique aspects of human nature is, in fact, humor. Without humor, how would various people groups have been able to maintain the moral necessary to pull through the various trials contained within their past? Without humor, would there even really be a reason to pull through trials? The value of a good and sincere laugh cannot be overestimated or overstated. And regardless of the light cast on Sappho by her magnanimous reputation, she herself could not have objected to the use of humor in literature.

With this train of thought as my basis for action- not to mention my hopeful attachment to literary redemption after my shameless alteration of Sappho’s works- I set out to create versions of three of Sappho’s works of poetry using shameless over-simplification and rather ridiculous modern-day contexts. The first poem I approached, “He is more than a hero”, has had the misfortunate of bearing the brunt of my whims in vernacular, and has been translated into a ludicrous “ghetto” love-ode appropriately titled, “He is More Than the Diggity Shiznit”. The original verse and stanza pattern has been more or less preserved, as has the overly-adoring attitude of the speaker, but the similarities stop there. While “He is more than a hero” appears to direct its admiration toward a woman by referring to a man considered worthy of sitting beside her, my translation directs similar admiration toward a man without the presence of an intermediary.

On a completely different tack, I approached Sappho’s “Don’t ask me what to wear”, a short piece of only a few stanzas directed toward Sappho’s daughter, Cleis, on a matter familiar to many mothers and daughters- that is, the wardrobe. As one of Sappho’s shorter and topically lighter poems, “Don’t ask me what to wear” was simple to alter. In order to satirize the work, I rewrote it from the perspective of a modern-day mother offering style advice from her own youth during the 1980’s and her own mother’s youth during the 1960’s. In addition, I changed the tone of the poem from “don’t ask me what to wear” to “why don’t you ask me what to wear?” indicating the mother’s wish that her daughter would ask her advice every once in a while. This attitude seemed somewhat more likely, at least given my own experiences and relationship with my mother.

Finally, I took on Sappho’s “I have not heard one word from her”. Although the earnest grief for a displaced friend contained within the original work is quite touching, I couldn’t help but consider how the poem could be molded into a modern, lighthearted and, let’s face it, slightly risqué little ditty. Delivered from the oh-so-sophisticated perspective of one half of an impromptu closet make-out session, this translation espouses the reminiscences and concerns developed post-shenanigan. Given Sappho’s reputed sexual open-mindedness, I like to think that she herself would have been rather amused by my light-hearted ramblings.