

# Dying

SAPPHO (c. 600 BC)

translated by ADAM F MCCUNE

## *Original Greek*

τὸ ἀποθνήσκειν κακόν:  
οἱ θεοὶ γὰρ οὕτω κειρίκασιν:  
ἀπέθνησκον γὰρ ἄν.

## *English Translation*

It is a wretched thing to die.  
So think the gods who live on high,  
Or they would die.

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*Greek text:* Sappho cited in Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.23 (Aristotle, *Ars Rhetorica*, ed. W. D. Ross, Oxford, 1959, *Persens Digital Library*).

Aristotle renders Sappho's saying in prose, but reordering and using word variants yields a metrical version, for example "τὸ θνάσκειν κακόν: οὕτω κειρίκασι θεοὶ: / ἔθνασκον γὰρ ἄν" (Hartung, qtd. Henry Thornton Wharton, *Sappho*, London, 1895, p. 161).